*Newsletter Article:*

When you notice memory loss, it’s time to talk

Talking about memory loss with a family member may feel uncomfortable. But it’s important to talk about your — or your loved one’s — changing abilities to remember or think. Starting that conversation could be one of the best things you can do for your family.

Sometimes memory loss is a sign of dementia or other health problems that should be addressed as soon as possible. When families work together to get care and support early on, you have more options for staying healthy and independent.

Brain health is an important part of overall health, like getting checked for your blood pressure or diabetes. But for many people, rais­ing the topic is the hardest part. Here are some tips for talking with a loved one about memory loss.

If you notice signs of memory loss in yourself:

* **Plan what you want to say.** Make notes ahead of time, if that helps you stay focused. Pick a time when you’re not rushed and a setting that’s calm, quiet and private.
* **Accept their support.** Ask your family member to work together with you to agree on your next steps.
* **Make an appointment with your health care provider.** Your provider should do tests to determine the degree of memory loss and to find the cause. Your doctor also should ask a lot of questions. Take a family member or friend along to help answer the doctor’s questions based on their own observations.

If a loved one is experiencing memory loss:

* **Choose the right place and time** for your conversation — a quiet, private spot when neither of you will feel rushed.
* **Plan what to say** for a respectful, productive conversation. Rather than telling them what to do, let them know why you’re concerned. Give them examples of changes you’ve noticed, without sounding judgmental.
* **Listen carefully.** Ask about their thoughts and observations.
* **Reassure them.** Some memory changes may indicate dementia, but not always. Some memory loss is caused by treatable, reversible conditions.
* **Ask your loved one to have a complete medical check-up,** if they don’t already have a doctor’s visit on the calendar. It’s important to know the cause of their memory loss and whether it can be treated or reversed. Plan to go with them to their visit.
* **Focus on the positive.** Your loved one might be worried about losing their independence. Talk about a visit to their health care provider as a way to help them stay independent. Remind them the goal is to understand what’s causing their memory loss — and to make things better.

If you or your family member needs help finding a provider, call the Center for MultiCultural Health at (206) 461-6910. You also can visit doh.wa.gov/memory to learn about some differences between normal aging and signs of memory loss that may dementia-related.

But the most important thing to know is: Don’t wait — early detection makes a big difference.