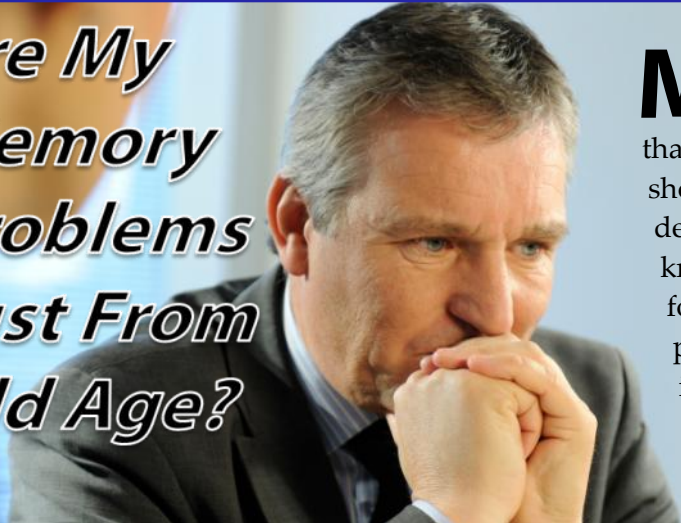


Health and Wellness

Provided by Bethany Care Ministry Outreach Program

Are My Memory Problems Just From Old Age?



Many friends of mine have expressed concerns about forgetting things more than they used to. They want to know if they should be concerned about dementia. One dear old friend related to me that she had known she was getting more and more forgetful but was trying to hide it from people because it all humiliated her, and that it irritated her to be reminded. She said she found out that making notes helped her and now her house had note pads everywhere. She also said that her driving had changed.

She was driving on the same familiar routes and had to return home the same way she went or she got confused. She smiled and said that, "no detours were on her prayer list." She told me that up until recently she blamed old age on these problems but now was worrying about the possibility of dementia or Alzheimer's. I explained that many people avoid seeking professional help because then it will become real to them, not just their over active imagination.

The word senility is derived from a Latin word that means "to grow old." However, growing old does not necessarily mean losing ones mental abilities. Dementia is a word used to describe progressive *significant* loss of mental ability. Symptoms of dementia include impairment in thinking, memory, judgment, as well as changes in personality and mood. Most people experience some changes in memory as they age. All body functions become slower as we age. We process information slower and it takes longer to learn new material.

If you are worried about your forgetfulness, ask yourself, "how did I know I forgot?" If your answer is, "I remembered it later," then you likely do not have dementia. If the dementing illness or cognitive impairment is due to an underlying medical condition, it may be partly or completely reversed. I remember when I worked in an assisted living residence in Minnesota, we often found that when people were fed well balanced nutritional meals and given their medications on time that their cognitive abilities improved. When living alone, depression and loneliness makes meal making a difficult and often neglected or forgotten task.

It is important to realize that early evaluation of these concerns is crucial. The anxiety and stress from worrying about the worst possible scenario will make all your health problems worse and will take the joy out of what could be a good day.

Do you need some help? If you are over fifty, disabled, or a caregiver and would like some gentle conversation about this or any other mental health issue, call 715-258-3289, for a *free* appointment with Counselor JoAnne Adkins from the Bethany Community Care Ministry Outreach Program. Bethany and Trinity are working together for your good mental health.

JoAnne Adkins, Counselor, Bethany Community Care Service

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