

Family Wellness Checklist

10 Critical Observations for Caring Families

Any holiday offers a precious opportunity to connect with aging loved ones. And they also provide a unique moment to compassionately assess their health and well-being. As family members, we are often the first to notice subtle changes that might indicate emerging care needs.

This checklist is designed to help you approach these observations with sensitivity, love, and proactive care - ensuring that your vulnerable family members remain safe, supported, and able to maintain their independence for as long as possible.

1. Fall Prevention Modifications

- Check for loose or uneven flooring, damaged thresholds, or broken steps that could cause tripping
- Bare floors (wood, tile or concrete) are not polished or slippery
- Remove or secure scatter rugs, especially in high-traffic areas and bathrooms
- Assess lighting conditions, ensuring all areas are well-lit and switches are easily accessible
- Look for potential hazards like electrical cords, clutter, or furniture blocking walkways
- Evaluate bathroom safety: need for grab bars near toilet and in shower, non-slip mats, shower chair

2. Physical Environment Safety

- Verify handrails are secure on staircases and hallways
- Check that frequently used items are within easy reach, avoiding need for stretching or climbing
- Ensure smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors are functional
- Look for signs of home maintenance issues like water damage, mold, or needed repairs
- Assess kitchen safety: stove functionality, safe storage of cooking tools, clear pathways

3. Outside Safety

- Concrete or brick steps are in good repair (no chips, cracks, uneven surfaces)
- Walkways and pathways are free of clutter and obstacles
- Walkway areas are cleared of snow, leaves and puddles

4. Cognitive and Health Indicators

- Observe medication management:
 - Check if medications are organized and not expired
 - Look for signs of missed doses or confusion about prescriptions
- Assess personal hygiene and home cleanliness
- Note any unexplained bruises or injuries that might indicate falls
- Check for signs of weight loss or changes in eating habits
- Evaluate mail and bill management for signs of confusion or potential financial exploitation

5. Cognitive Function Warning Signs

- Repeated stories or questions
- Difficulty following conversations
- Forgetting recent events or conversations
- Misplacing items frequently
- Challenges with familiar tasks like cooking or managing finances
- Changes in personality or mood
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Difficulty managing medications or medical appointments

6. Physical Health Red Flags

- Unexpected weight loss or gain
- Reluctance to discuss health issues
- Noticeable changes in mobility
- Hesitation to move around or participate in activities
- Signs of depression or social withdrawal
- Unexplained bruises or signs of potential falls

7. Technology and Communication

- Ensure easy access to communication devices
- Set up emergency contact systems
- Consider medical alert devices
- Check phone and communication capabilities. Are there phones in all rooms where time is spent or do they have a cell phone
- Is a Personal Emergency Response (PERS) needed? This is a small device worn on the wrist or neck that enables the wearer to signal for help through a 24-hour communication system.

8. Nutrition and Self-Care

- Check refrigerator for expired food
- Assess ability to prepare meals
- Look for signs of proper nutrition
- Evaluate kitchen appliance usage

9. Recommended Next Steps

- Discuss observations with other family members
- Consult with parent's healthcare provider
- Consider professional home safety assessment
- Explore supportive living options if significant concerns exist

10. Important Considerations

- Approach conversations with empathy and respect
- Involve parent in decision-making
- Maintain their sense of independence and dignity

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