

**Red Flag Checklist by Sandra Haymon, Ph.D.**  
**Baby Boomers – Sandwiched Between Retirement and Caregiving**  
<http://www.babyboomerssandwich.com/>

**Decreases Cognitive Functioning**

- General confusion
- Gets lost in own neighborhood
- Can't remember names of family members
- Short-term memory loss
- Forgets and leaves the engine of his/her vehicle running
- Confuses the heat thermostat with the air conditioning controls
- Wears more than one outfit at the same time (Several shirts, pants, dresses)
- Forgets to feed pets or clean cat litter pan
- Forgets to retrieve mail from mailbox for several days
- Does not remember eating meals
- Forgets appointments frequently
- Leaves keys hanging on the outside of the door
- Calls police frequently for unapparent reasons or because she/he hears imagined noises
- Doesn't know the identity of the U.S. President
- Inability to count backwards from 20
- Cannot remember/recite the alphabet
- Hears voices not heard by others
- Sees things not seen by others
- Accuses spouse of having affairs even when spouse can barely stand or walk

**Decreased Physical Functioning**

- Lacks coordination
- Bladder/bowel incontinent
- No longer able to shave
- Inability to hear phone/doorbell
- Stays in bed even when not sick
- Requires help getting out of bed/chairs
- Unusual shakiness of hands and/or legs
- Unexplained bruises/injuries
- Night sweats
- Frequent diarrhea
- Seeing several physicians for the same or similar complaints
- Difficult using a telephone
- Difficult operating a television
- No longer able to operate washing machine/dryer

**Decreased General Functioning**

- Overly suspicious (Inappropriately questions the motives of others)
- Paranoid behaviors (Bars doors/windows, looks under beds and in closets without reason)
- Appears unusually anxious
- Misplaces things and accuses others of stealing them
- Becomes upset easily (cries/laughs inappropriately)
- Appears more depressed than unusual
- Appears depressed more frequently
- Becomes extremely afraid of animals
- Becomes obsessed with a pet or treats pet as having human qualities
- Accidental hypo or hyperthermia (Exposure to extreme temperatures—hot or cold)

- Outbursts of anger/aggression
- Extremely restless/fidgety
- Frequently goes to bed two or three hours earlier than usual at night
- Nighttime sleep is accompanied with several brief wakening's
- Nightmares
- Insomnia
- Night prowls (cat naps during the day then wanders around the house during the night)

### **Decreased Social Functioning**

- Conflicts with neighbors
- Social withdrawal
- Isolation/Estrangement
- Becomes hostile for unapparent reasons
- Diminished social skills
- Inability to carry on two-way conversation

### **Decreased Eating Habits**

- Eats food that is not fresh
- Eats unbalanced meals (Consuming lots of sweets)
- Hoards food
- Cooks food and forgets to eat it
- Refuses to eat

### **Decreased Personal Hygiene/Cleanliness of Environment**

- Does not take regular baths or shampoo hair
- Does not brush teeth or keep dentures clean
- Does not keep fingernails and toenails clean and groomed
- Wears soiled clothes
- Mixes clean and soiled clothes together
- Does not wash clothes regularly
- Does not change bed linens regularly
- Does not keep shoes clean and in good repair
- Does not keep bathrooms clean and fresh
- Fails to maintain a clean home environment
- Allows garbage to collect inside house
- Does not keep dishes washed and put away
- Does not discard old food from refrigerator and clean it
- Does not keep litter boxes clean

### **Disorientation**

- Doesn't know the time of day, day of week, month of year, seasons, what year it is
- Doesn't know where she/he is physically
- Doesn't know what city or state she/he is in

### **Decreased Ability to Handle Money Matters**

- Hides/loses money and cannot remember where it is—accuses others of theft
- Careless in bill paying (Paying bills more than once or not at all)
- Unintentional shoplifting (Takes goods without realizing they're not paid for)
- Uncontrollable spending sprees—May order things from phone solicitors and not remember
- Orders excessively from shopping networks and/or catalogues
- Pays money to strangers for work not performed
- Gives money to strangers

- Careless with checks (Signs blank check and gives to others)
- Puts new acquaintances on checking/savings accounts
- Withdraws money from the bank for strangers
- Easily manipulated by unscrupulous vendors
- Makes drastic changes in wills or trusts to include mere acquaintances or charitable organizations and/or excludes family members

### **Critical Red Flags**

If even one flag on this list is checked, immediate intervention is indicated

### **Signs of Potential Harm to Self or Others**

- Chokes on food
- Leaves gas stove on with no flame
- Forgets pots are cooking on the stove
- Burns food frequently
- Inability to take medications properly
- Inability to safely drive automobile yet continues to drive
- Cigarette burns on clothing/furniture
- Often loses balance/stumbles/falls frequently
- Carelessness with firearms

### **Alcohol-Specific Indicators**

Due to changes in physiology in elderly persons, consumption of alcohol could lead to problems even when the amount consumed is minimal. One daily cocktail combined with some over-the-counter as well as many prescribed medications may be dangerous.

- Continues to drink in a social context while taking medications.
- Obvious intoxication
- Previous history or alcohol abuse
- Diagnosis of cirrhosis of the liver
- Previous arrests/tickets for DUI
- Alcohol-related accidents
- Previous hospitalizations for alcohol-related problems
- Hides alcohol
- The presence of empty alcohol containers
- Frequent trips to neighborhood stores for the purpose of buying beer/wine/liquor
- Previous history of behavioral problems
- Previous history of psychiatric problems
- Impairments in the ability to process verbal information/drinking oneself into oblivion
- Passes out from alcohol
- Vomits in bed (This is extremely dangerous due to the possibility of choking on vomit.)
- Delirium tremens (DTs)