

Signs More Help Might Be Needed

No-one wants to lose their independence, and it can be difficult to consider the possibility as we age that we may need help. Having conversations early on with loved ones about expectations and future care options can help to prevent a crisis. The reality is that these conversations often don't take place until an unexpected event or health problem occurs.

It often rests on family members to recognize the signs that an older family member might need support at home. It can be hard to decide when to start the conversation, or when there may be a need to seek medical help to assess if there are underlying health issues contributing to a change in behaviour. The US Administration on Aging suggests there are [ten warning signs](#) that an older person living at home may need help, including:

- changes in eating habits resulting in missed meals and weight loss
- neglecting personal hygiene and grooming, such as not showering, wearing dirty or stained clothes, having neglected nails or hair
- a change in behaviour – exhibiting paranoia, becoming agitated, making phone calls at all hours
- neglecting the house, not doing the cleaning or extreme clutter
- loss of interest in and stopping previously enjoyed social activities
- making unusual purchases, being taken in by 'scammers' or being persuaded by telemarketing advertising
- becoming forgetful, unopened mail, mislaid items or unpaid bills and missed appointments
- unexplained bruises and injuries.

The changes may be small, however many of these changes are recognized indicators of increasing frailty. Increased frailty has been shown to be associated with falls, longer stays in hospital and greater difficulty recovering from illness and surgery.

A recent Australian study has developed a simple online five step [frailty screen](#) to help identify when an older person may need some assistance to reduce or manage their frailty. With the right support at the right time frailty might be halted or even reversed by consulting health professionals for safe, simple and practical interventions. The federal [Minister for Ageing](#) has encouraged all older Australians to take the simple online test and follow up with a GP as necessary.

Don't be afraid or feel guilty in asking for a helping hand. Through timely planning and establishing the right support at the right time it is possible to remain at home for as long as possible and Live Well Longer!