



Red Flags

When assessing someone, look out for these **red flags**.

If present, or if you have any concern for an atypical presentation, get head imaging and refer to a specialist urgently.

Red Flag	Description, Example, Significance
Rapidly progressive cognitive decline	Decline over weeks to months, not years; suggests atypical, rapid progressive, or reversible etiology
Acute or fluctuating changes in mental status	Sudden onset or waxing and waning confusion; suggests delirium or metabolic disturbance
New focal neurologic deficits	Weakness, aphasia, visual field loss, or other localized findings; needs head imaging
New onset seizures	Seizures in the context of cognitive decline; needs head imaging, EEG
Gait disturbance or frequent falls	New or worsening gait instability, frequent falls, or parkinsonism; possible non-Alzheimer's etiology
Systemic symptoms	Fever, weight loss, or other signs of infection, malignancy, or systemic illness
Young age of onset (<65 years) or strong family history	Early onset dementia or significant family history of neurodegenerative disease
Prominent or new psychiatric or behavioral symptoms	Disinhibition, hallucinations, severe agitation, or marked personality change
Inability to perform previously routine complex tasks despite "normal" brief cognitive testing	Loss of ability to manage finances, work, or other complex tasks, even if screening is normal
Recent or unexplained weight loss or accelerated decline in function	Physical decline or rapid loss of independence; medical cause, atypical, rapidly progressive, or reversible etiology