10 Steps to Approach Memory Concerns

June is Alzheimer’s and Brain Awareness Month. This is a great time for us not only to learn more about Alzheimer’s and how it affects the brain, but also a good time to become more aware of our own personal health. Changes in memory, thinking or behavior should be treated just like any other ache or pain we might be experiencing. It’s natural to feel uncomfortable discussing these types of changes with others, and voicing these worries can make them seem more “real”. However, these are significant health concerns and it is important to seek help.

The first step is to Assess the Situation. What changes in memory, thinking or behavior are you noticing? What is happening that feels out of the ordinary and is causing you concern? Step #2: Consider what else might be going on? Many times we have a tendency to jump to conclusions and think “worst case scenario”. Are there any health or lifestyle issues that could be a factor such as family stress or medical problems like diabetes or depression? Step #3: Learn about the signs of Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementias and the benefits of an early diagnosis. Complete the assessment with Step #4: Has anyone expressed concern to you about changes they have observed? If so, what did they notice?

Once you have assessed the situation, Have a Conversation. This process begins with Step #5: Think about who you can discuss your concerns with. It is helpful to confide in someone we trust, rather than face the issue alone. Step #6: Have a conversation as soon as possible. Consider the best time to get together and a location that everyone will feel comfortable with. Step #7: Consider how you will approach the conversation. You might start by saying “I’ve noticed a change in myself, related to my memory, and I’m concerned. Have you noticed anything about me that worries you?” Finally, end the conversation with Step #8: Ask the person to go with you to the doctor. When dealing with possible memory or behavior issues, it can be helpful to bring someone we trust to the doctor. In addition to providing support, the person can help with asking the doctor questions and making sure you understand the information provided.

Keep in mind you may need to have multiple conversations (Step #9). Some people may not take your concerns seriously or attribute them to stress or normal aging. However, you know yourself and the validity of your concerns best. Write down some notes about the experience to help plan for the next conversation, whether it is with the same person, or someone else you trust. Finally, Step #10: Reach out for help. The Alzheimer’s Association has a wealth of information on their website at www.alz.org.

An early diagnosis of Alzheimer’s brings with it many opportunities. Medical benefits include
access to treatment options. While current medications do not prevent, stop or reverse Alzheimer’s, they can help lessen the symptoms for a limited time. You might also have the opportunity to be eligible for clinical trials.

In addition to medical benefits, there will be time for you to meet with your family to express your wishes about legal, financial and end-of-life decisions. You can also address potential safety issues, such as driving or wandering, ahead of time.

Finally, an early diagnosis of Alzheimer’s can also help lessen anxieties about why you are experiencing symptoms. You and your family also have the opportunity to maximize your time together, including accessing resources and support services, as well as checking items off your “bucket list”.

For a checklist highlighting the 10 Steps to Approach Memory Concerns, as well as a list of the 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s, visit our website at www.maraisdesgygnes.k-state.edu, or the Alzheimer’s Association website at alz.org.

Source: Alz.org. For more information about Adults & Aging, contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829) offices, or write to kgoul@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescygnes.k-state.edu.