11 Signs of Frontotemporal Dementias or “Pick’s Disease”

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD), formerly referred to as “Pick’s Disease,” is an umbrella term for variety of disorders that cause the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain to shrink.

Since these areas are responsible for a person’s behavior, personality, and language, people affected with FTD can undergo dramatic behavioral changes that negatively affect themselves and their loved ones.

Since memory isn’t an issue at first and FTD tends to occur at a younger age than most other dementias (often between 40 and 75 years), dementia is often overlooked as a cause.

Getting an early and accurate diagnosis is key to managing future emotional, physical, and financial challenges, which is why we’ve put together a list of the 11 most common signs of Frontotemporal Dementias for you to be aware of:

1. **Impulsive, inappropriate behaviors and speech**: Your frontal lobe, located behind your forehead, regulates your behaviors and impulses. As FTD begins to affect this area of the brain, people might suddenly begin to say rude or mean things to others, or become entirely uninhibited in pleasure-seeking activities such as food, drinking, or sex.

2. **Loss of interpersonal skills and/or empathy**: As FTD progresses, a person’s ability to see things from another person’s point of view diminishes. A previously compassionate and caring person might suddenly be non-responsive to another’s distress, or may no longer correctly respond to common social cues.

3. **Apathy**: Often mistaken as depression, a person with FTD might become fairly withdrawn, self-centered, and emotionally distant.

4. **Decreasing Self-Awareness & Personal Hygiene**: A person affected by FTD will have less and less self-awareness as the disease progresses. A lack of concern about
their personal appearance is common, making them appear increasingly unkept over time.

5. **Lack of reasoning and logic (making poor decisions):** As the frontal lobe shrinks, a person’s ability to reason decreases while impulsivity increases, making it more likely for them to suddenly begin making unsafe or financially damaging decisions.

6. **Repetitive Compulsive Behaviors:** People living with FTD might develop Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), an anxiety disorder that is characterized by unwanted and repetitive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that drive them ‘to do something’ (compulsions).

7. **Inability to Plan or Concentrate:** Planning requires us to be able to think in a step-by-step process. When a person’s brain is affected by FTD, they are less and less able to concentrate and initiate steps to successfully sequence them (Step A => Step B => Step C, etc.)

8. **Sudden and Frequent Mood Changes:** A person with FTD might be sad one moment, and euphoric just a short while later. Erratic and unpredictable mood changes can occur as the brain change progresses.

9. **Speech & Language Difficulties:** Depending on the type of FTD, a person’s ability to verbalize and comprehend language can become increasingly challenging as the temporal lobes begin to change. The affected person might speak very slowly, have trouble finding the right words, or be unable to name objects.

10. **Balance & Movement Problems:** Some types of FTD cause mobility problems similar to those observed with Parkinson’s disease. These can include muscle weakness, balance issues, tremors, rigidity, muscle spasms, and poor coordination.

11. **Memory Loss:** Unlike Alzheimer’s disease, those living with FTD commonly don’t suffer from memory issues and are able to keep track of day-to-day events until the condition progresses into a more advanced stage.
Always Remember:

Difficult behaviors displayed by a person living with a form of Frontotemporal dementia are not out of ill-will, but are symptoms of a changing brain.

If you have a loved one suffering from this condition, remind yourself that he/she has little or no awareness and is unable to control the problem behaviors.

Planning ahead and learning how to best manage challenging behaviors can greatly help ease this difficult journey.

To help get you started, you can view a few excerpts of Teepa Snow’s program “Understanding Frontotemporal Dementias” on the bottom of this webpage: 

⇒ The steps above are a great starting point to learn more about FTD. If you want to know even more to offer the best caregiving experience possible, make sure you watch Teepa Snow’s program “Understanding Frontotemporal Dementias.” Learn more at goo.gl/SqvF2.