

Senior Moments - Not Always What We Think

Contributed by Toni Livesey
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As we grow older we all have senior moments but are they really warning signs of something worse that is still to come?

We had just got home from a pleasant hour or so shopping and having a coffee at our favourite café down by the beach and as we got out of the car I made a comment to Stuart about something we had seen in town. He looked at me with a rather puzzled look on his face and then laughed and apologised for having a senior moment.

But I know that behind that laugh was some concern that the senior moment might have been a hint of worse to come in years ahead. I know that Stuart, at 55, is particularly concerned because his mother suffered from a dementia like disease for some years before she passed away and he worries that he will go the same way.

Stuart is not alone in worrying about 'senior moments'; many many people worry that those momentary lapses in concentration are a precursor of something much worse to come.

However, some recent research by the University of New South Wales has shown that many Australians are worrying unnecessarily about their mental health. It's perfectly normal for people to have 'senior moments' as they age but people tend not to be prepared for it when it happens.

If you were to ask Stuart he would be quick to tell you that his body might be that of a 55 year old but inside he still thinks and feels as if he were only 19 or 20. Many people are just the same and so when 'senior moments' occur they are not ready for them.

For most people those moments are nothing more than signs that they are aging and not signs that they are drifting into dementia. In fact the University of New South Wales study showed that only 43% of those who had 'senior moments' were displaying any signs of significant impairments that might be a sign of the onset of dementia.

Researchers suggest that these figures now show that many people become overly sensitive to the possibility that they are developing dementia. These people are probably not the best judge of their own mental state because they almost automatically believe that they are beginning to suffer from dementia.

For Stuart that should come as a great relief … if only he would stop worrying about it.