DEMENTIA

Over 50 million people worldwide suffer from dementia. While there is no cure for neurodegenerative issues, early diagnosis, and treatment can see the conditions managed and their impacts mitigated.

There are several potential warning signs to be aware of when it comes to dementia, which is an umbrella term for over 200 variants of cognitive decline, including Alzheimer's. In his new book, *How to Prevent Dementia*, Dr Richard Restak, a neurologist, outlined some of the lesser-known potential warning signs of dementia.

The brain expert said that in the majority of cases, “an onset event or starting point [for dementia] cannot be identified”, but he contended that “we know for sure... that the disease process begins long before the first appearance of symptoms".

The early signs can be difficult to spot, but they have in common that all are “marked by an uncertain starting point called Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)”. MCI, however, isn’t always a sign of dementia, said Dr Restak. “MCI may or may not be the initial starting point for Alzheimer’s disease; only the passage of time can permit that determination.”

While MCI doesn't always mean a person will contract dementia, the condition typically begins with MCI. Some signs are "barely noticeable" but Dr Restak said that it is of big importance that they are monitored. It can be difficult and requires a keen eye because the signs are "mild." This decline in thinking is “occurring in a setting of overall generally acceptable function”.

Food shopping is an activity where these early signs of cognitive decline can show up. “The person with MCI can come and go to the supermarket, for instance, but must write down a grocery list; nor can the person remember, as done previously, the aisle in which a particular grocery item can be found," Dr Restak said.

Another potential sign is a business person who has become increasingly irritable and constantly looks to take notes in meetings to compensate for becoming forgetful. However, it is important to remember that MCI does not always mean a person will develop dementia.

“MCI affects about 8 percent of people in the ages 65–69 range; 10 percent of those in the 70–74 range, and 15 percent of people 75–79 years of age," said Dr Restak. “Over a third of people aged 85 and older are affected with MCI.”