

Tuberculosis Symptom Checklist for Caregivers

The elderly may not always present with the classic signs and symptoms of active tuberculosis (TB). It is important to consider other symptoms as possible signs of disease. If you notice any of the following new symptoms, further investigation may be warranted. It is also important to consider individual risk factors when assessing for the possibility of TB disease.

Classic symptoms:

- Cough lasting longer than 3 weeks
- Hemoptysis (coughing up blood)
- Fever
- Night sweats
- Unintentional weight loss
- Anorexia
- Chest pain
- Dyspnea (difficulty breathing)

Additional symptoms to watch for in the elderly:

- Failure to thrive
- Unexplained fatigue
- Low-grade fever
- Cognitive impairment
- Changes in functional ability (activities of daily living)

Individual factors that increase the risk for developing TB disease:

- Infected with TB bacteria within the last two years
- X-ray suggesting previous TB, and no adequate treatment received
- Treatment with steroids (glucocorticoids)
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Organ transplants (due to use of immune suppressing drugs)
- Certain lung disease called silicosis
- Chronic kidney failure requiring dialysis
- Cancer of the head and neck
- HIV/AIDS

References:

1. Public Health Agency of Canada, (2014). *Canadian Tuberculosis Standards*, 7th Edition. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/canadian-tuberculosis-standards-7th-edition.html>
2. Heymann, D. L. (Ed). (2008). *Control of communicable diseases manual* (19th ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
3. Zagaria, M. A. E. (2008). Tuberculosis: a preventable cause of death in the elderly. *U.S. Pharmacist*, 33(7), 23-25.