

Worried about dementia?

Getting help from your doctor, important points to consider

All kinds of things can affect memory or make you feel confused. Many of these things, although distressing at the time, can be cured or treated. Some of the things that can affect memory are:

Stress or anxiety	Having too many things on your mind	Illness and infection
Unhappiness and depression	Bereavement	Lack of sleep
Noise or other distractions	Vitamin deficiency or a thyroid disorder	The side effects of sleeping pills, sedatives, or other drugs
Overuse of alcohol	Menopause	Conditions such as mild cognitive impairment, a stroke or dementia
A minor brain injury after a bump to the head or concussion	Delirium	General anaesthetic

Points to consider when seeking help from your doctor:

- As a relative if you are worried about someone who will not visit a GP. GPs are usually happy to be contacted by relatives either in writing or verbally over the phone.
- Routine appointments tend to last around 10 minutes. If possible, ask if double appointment can be booked if you have a lot to discuss. Remember to take a notepad.
- How is it affecting the person concerned and the family?
 - Keep notes and a diary. It can be helpful to include the date and time of day.
 - When did you start noticing changes?
 - How rapidly are the changes progressing?
 - What is it affecting e.g., money, concentration, mood, word finding, daily habits (changes to routine), disorientation in surroundings or with people, language trouble?
- Sudden changes – When contacting your doctor, if you are asked by a receptionist if it is urgent then say yes if you have noticed a sudden decline, as this could be an infection, be honest with the receptionist.
- What do you as a patient/relative think it is? Have you seen similar symptoms in someone before?
- What are you concerned about – safety, personal care and hygiene, nutrition, legal, financial issues?
- What are your expectations e.g., are you expecting a brain scan by a specific date?
- Patient background – be prepared to tell the doctor a bit about home life, such as:
 - next of kin
 - home environment – are there stairs? is it a busy home? etc.
 - who else lives in the house?
 - does the person have visitors or support?
 - how is the person coping with cooking, cleaning, shopping, finances, also self-care, eating, drinking, sleeping, washing etc.?
- Current diagnosis – is the patient up to date with any long-term conditions or tests? Are they taking the expected medication?
- Contact details on medical record – make sure patient and next of kin details are up to date. Should next of kin be alerted prior to appointments to remind the patient? Can this be added to the patients notes so hospitals can see this information as well?
- If you don't yet have a formal diagnosis of dementia but you require additional help/support, you can still contact your local social work department to ask for an assessment.
- You may also wish to research Power of Attorney – Is this currently in place and who might they want involved in any future care?