

# My Memory And Thinking Are Not What They Used To Be. Should I Be Concerned?





## **If I am concerned about my memory and thinking, should I tell my doctor, nurse, or another health care professional?**

Yes! If you are worried about your memory and thinking, talk to a health care professional.

To help you plan your discussion, you can print the form below, fill it out, and take it with you to your appointment. If you need help with this form or the questions on it, ask a trusted friend or family member to help you fill it out and come with you to your appointment.

Your doctor, nurse, or another staff member may ask you about medications you are taking. They may also ask about everyday habits, feelings, and activities and if they have changed. These include topics like sleep, physical activity, appetite, worry or sadness, or new stresses in your life.

Your health care professional may ask you to make a second appointment to talk further about your concerns.

## **What is dementia?**

Dementia is not a specific disease. It is a general term for brain disorders that start during adulthood and interfere with thinking, remembering, communicating, or making decisions in daily life. Brain disorders can be due to diseases or injuries.

## **What is Alzheimer's disease?**

Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia. Older people are more likely to develop Alzheimer's, but it can sometimes occur at younger ages.

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## **Other than Alzheimer's, what are the other types of dementia?**

Vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and fronto-temporal dementia are some of the other types of dementia. Having more than one type of dementia at the same time is called mixed dementia.

## **Are older people the only ones who get dementia?**

No. Though dementia is more common in older people, some types of dementia can also affect younger people.

## **What is mild cognitive impairment?**

Mild cognitive impairment describes changes in memory and thinking that make paying bills, following a recipe, or doing other complicated daily activities more challenging or require more effort. Mild cognitive impairment is not dementia because it doesn't prevent a person from doing what they have always done before. Not all individuals with mild cognitive impairment go on to develop dementia, but some do. It's important to tell a doctor, nurse, or other health care professional about your experiences. Don't put it off!

If your health care professional diagnoses you with mild cognitive impairment they will monitor your symptoms and will discuss what to do if they worsen.

## **What are the symptoms of dementia?**

Symptoms vary from person to person. Dementia isn't just memory loss. One person living with dementia may forget things, struggle with making decisions, or have trouble following directions. Another person may have trouble with words, having a conversation, or knowing when they've offended someone. Another may experience personality changes or get lost on the way home. It's important to tell a doctor, nurse, or other health care professional about your experiences. Don't rely on guesswork when it comes to your brain!

## **If my memory is getting worse, does that mean I have Alzheimer's or another type of dementia?**

No. Memory changes can be due to other medical conditions like mild cognitive impairment, vitamin deficiencies, medication side effects or interactions, serious heart or lung disease, or kidney disease. They can also be due to severe stress and other mental health problems. It isn't always easy to tell when changes in memory are a symptom of a brain disorder like dementia—this is one reason doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals need to ask detailed questions and use tests to help evaluate a person's memory.



## **How will I know if my doctor, nurse, or other health care professional has the knowledge and experience to help me with my memory concerns?**

Some health care professionals know a lot about brain disorders like dementia, are comfortable diagnosing these conditions, and are comfortable helping patients manage their dementia and symptoms. Others may have less experience or want to refer their patients to a specialist like a gerontologist or neurologist.

If your provider doesn't talk to you about their experience and comfort level, you can ask questions. While you may feel uncomfortable, it is appropriate to ask health care professionals about their experience with brain disorders and what services they offer in their offices.

## **Is dementia a normal part of aging?**

No! Most older people never develop dementia. Memory loss that interferes with daily life is not a normal part of aging.

## Are you ready to talk to your doctor, nurse, or another health care professional?

1. Make an appointment.
2. Print out this form.
3. Answer the questions before your health care appointment. You may want to talk with a close family member or a trusted friend when you consider the questions. You may also bring that person with you to your appointment if you feel comfortable doing so.
4. Hand the form to your doctor, nurse, or another staff member and request that they read it.
5. Discuss your answers (you may need to schedule a separate appointment if you need more time).

1. Are you concerned about your memory or thinking?

yes  no

2. Describe your concerns about your memory and thinking. For example, are there specific situations or things that worry you?

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3. Has anyone else noticed changes in your memory or thinking (a family member, partner, friend or acquaintance, another health care professional, or other)?

yes  no

If yes, describe what they noticed: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Is this your first time discussing these concerns and symptoms with a health care professional?

yes  no

If no, what did you discuss and what was the result? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Think about your memory and thinking a year ago. Have your symptoms gotten worse, better, or stayed the same?

worse  better  stayed the same

6. How do these symptoms affect things you do in your daily life (managing money, managing medications, completing tasks at work or at home, cooking, shopping, navigating familiar places, interacting with friends and family, or other activities not listed here)? Are certain activities more difficult? Have you had to stop doing some things because of changes in your memory or thinking?

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7. Have these symptoms affected how you feel? Do they make you concerned, sad, nervous, frustrated, or worried, or cause other negative feelings?

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8. Is there anything else you would like the doctor, nurse, or other health care professional to know?

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**For health care professionals:** For resources about dementia detection and patient-health care worker communication during and after diagnosis, see the New York University BOLD Center on Early Detection and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Toolkit for Health Systems available at <https://bolddementiadetection.org/>.