

# About you: Talking with your doctor

**This help sheet discusses ways of talking about your dementia with your doctor and other medical professionals, so you get the health care, advice and support you want.**

After a dementia diagnosis, you are likely to receive treatment from a range of medical and health professionals. These may include:

- your doctor
- medical specialists
- allied health professionals
- community nurses
- social workers.

It is important you get to know your doctor so you can decide if they are the right person to support you and if their medical practice can meet your needs.

Your doctor and practice nurses also need to get to know you. This will help them understand your dementia and recommend the best treatments. Be open and honest, and let them know if you do not understand something.

Developing a strong relationship with your doctor is an important step. Your doctor can provide support, from diagnosis through to ongoing management and care. They can also refer you to specialist health professionals to treat specific dementia symptoms.

## Where to begin

A useful way to think about working with doctors is to regard yourself, your doctor and your family as a team aiming to provide you with the best possible care.

## **A good doctor:**

- is a ready source of advice and support
- listens to you and your opinions
- explains things in words you can understand
- gives you time to speak
- takes time to answer your questions
- helps you feel comfortable
- respects you and your family members.

## **Making the most of your appointment**

- Make your appointment at a time of day that suits you best.
- Book a long appointment so you have time to discuss things in detail.
- It can be helpful to have a family member or friend visit the doctor with you.
- Consider calling ahead to check if the appointment is running on time.
- Give the doctor a list of the medications, vitamins and supplements you take.
- Keep a record of any changes you have noticed to discuss at the appointment.
- Write a list of questions to ask the doctor.
- Take notes of what the doctor is saying. You can also ask for relevant information to take home and review later, such as information about medical conditions, treatments, medications, services and supports.

## **Communication**

Communication is a two-way process. Let the doctor know what you need. If you don't understand what is being said, ask the doctor to explain it in a different way.

You should be able to talk freely to any doctor and be assured that all discussions are confidential.

## **Keeping track**

You may be speaking to many people, so it can be helpful to keep a folder or notebook about conversations with doctors and others. You can record who you spoke to and when, and the details of what was discussed.

## **Taking someone with you**

It can be helpful to have a family member or friend visit the doctor with you. Taking someone with you means they can be there to support you, and to listen and take notes.

During the appointment, the doctor may ask the person accompanying you for their observations about your health and wellbeing. This information could help the doctor provide the best support for you.

## **Your privacy**

Doctors cannot talk about patients without the patient's consent. If you tell the doctor that no information is to be given to family or carers, the doctor must abide by this.

## **Speaking up for yourself**

Sometimes it isn't easy to get the information you need. If you feel unhappy with the information and support you receive from the doctor, consider meeting with other doctors, until you find one who meets your needs.

## **Referrals**

At any time, you can ask to see a specialist or ask to be referred back to a specialist.

Most doctors make referrals to specialists they use regularly. If you prefer, you can ask for a referral to the specialist of your choice.

## **Language and cultural needs**

If you would prefer information in another language, there are many doctors and their staff who speak different languages and understand different cultures. Your doctor may be able to assist with a referral.

## Your rights

It is important to help your doctor understand your experience of dementia. You have the right to change doctors if you feel your doctor is not meeting your needs.

## Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia library service  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/library](https://dementia.org.au/library)
- Dementia Australia support  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/support](https://dementia.org.au/support)
- Dementia Australia education  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/education](https://dementia.org.au/education)

### Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**For language assistance: 131 450**

**Visit our website: [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)**