

ABOUT YOU... TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR

If you have been diagnosed with dementia, this Help Sheet may be useful. It discusses ways of talking with your doctor to make sure that you obtain the health care, advice and support you want.

If you have dementia, you are likely to have contact with a number of health and medical professionals. Your family members, or others close to you, are also likely to have involvement.

During the process of having an assessment of your symptoms and determining a diagnosis, it is likely that you will have contact with other medical specialists. In the longer term though, it is the family doctor who is usually the health professional providing on-going health care. This means that your doctor's relationship with you and your family is critical.

Where to begin

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

Doctors cannot talk about their patients without their consent. If you tell the doctor that no information is to be given to relatives, the doctor must abide by this.

However most people want to talk about their condition with someone close to them. Talking to the doctor together is generally the best way to do this.

A good doctor for you and your family:

- 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 and takes time to answer your questions
- Helps you feel comfortable
- Respects you, as well as your family members

What to try

Communicating

Communication is a two way process. You need to let the doctor know what it is you want. If you don't understand what is being said, ask to have it explained in a different way.

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

Getting the information you need

Some people find it helpful to make a list of questions to ask the doctor. Take notes of what the doctor is saying, or ask the doctor to write it down so that you can look at it later. Consider taking someone with you who can ask the questions or write down the answers.

Keeping track

Many people find it helpful to keep a folder or notes about their conversations with doctors and others, recording who they spoke to, and when. Sometimes it can feel as if you have spoken to so many people that you can't remember the details of what was discussed with whom.

Making time

Make an appointment at a suitable time of the day. If the early morning or late afternoon is a difficult time for you, avoid these times for appointments. Ask for a longer appointment if you feel you need it.

Speaking up for yourself

Sometimes it isn't easy to get the information you need. Be prepared to look around until you find a doctor who meets your needs. Talking to other people about their experiences with doctors can help.

Referrals

Most doctors refer to a range of specialists they use regularly and have close contact with. However you can ask for a referral to the specialist of your choice if you wish. You can also ask to be referred back to a specialist if you feel your circumstances have changed.

Special needs

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. However you have the right to change doctors if you feel your doctor is not meeting your needs.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Alzheimer's Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at fightdementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**