



## Seeing your GP

Memory problems aren't just caused by dementia – they can also be caused by:

- depression
- anxiety
- stress
- medications
- alcohol or drugs
- other health problems
- hormonal disturbances
- nutritional deficiencies (B12 deficient)
- lack of sleep
- infections (chest or water)

Your GP can carry out some simple checks to try to find out what the cause may be. They can then refer you to a specialist for assessment, if necessary.

Your GP will ask about your concerns and what you or your family have noticed. They'll also check other aspects of your health, and carry out a physical examination.

They may also organise some blood tests and ask about any medication you're taking to rule out other possible causes of your symptoms.

You'll usually be asked some questions and carry out some memory, thinking, and pen and paper tasks to check how different areas of your brain are functioning. This can help your GP decide if you need to be referred to a specialist for more assessments.

**If you are referred for more tests, this does not mean you have dementia**

## Referral to a specialist

Your GP may refer you to a specialist memory assessment service to help with your diagnosis. Memory clinics are staffed by professionals from multiple disciplines who are experts in diagnosing, caring for and advising people with dementia and their families.

Memory clinic staff can include the following, depending on your local area:

- a **nurse** – usually a trained mental health nurse who specialises in diagnosing and caring for people with dementia
- a **psychologist** – a healthcare professional who specialises in the assessment and treatment of mental health conditions
- a **psychiatrist** – a qualified medical doctor who has training in treating mental health conditions
- a **neurologist** – a specialist in treating conditions that affect the nervous system (the brain and spinal cord)
- a **geriatrician** – a physician with specialist training in the care of older people
- a **social worker** – a trained member of staff able to advise and assist with accessing social services within the local area
- an **occupational therapist** – a member of staff with specialist skills in assessing and supporting people with dementia and their families with adjusting to disabilities

It looks like a lot of people are here but you will not see all of them, and it is a friendly place with trained staff to give lots of reassurance, someone from Teesside Dementia link Services may also be available to come with you.

There's no simple and reliable test for diagnosing Alzheimer's disease, but the staff will listen to the concerns of both you and your family about your memory or thinking. They will assess your skills and arrange more tests to rule out other conditions.

## Assessing your mental abilities

A specialist will usually assess your mental abilities using a special series of questions.

One widely used test is the mini mental state examination (MMSE). This involves being asked to carry out activities such as memorising a short list of objects correctly

info sheet 3.3

and identifying the current day of the week, month and year. Different memory clinics may also use other, longer tests.

## Tests

To rule out other possible causes of your symptoms and look for possible signs of damage caused by Alzheimer's disease / Dementia your specialist may recommend having a brain scan. This could be a:

CT scan - where several X-rays of your brain are taken at slightly different angles and a computer is used to put the images together

MRI scan– where a strong magnetic field and radio waves are used to produce detailed images of the inside of your brain

## After diagnosis

It may take several appointments and tests over months, or even years, before a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease / Dementia can be confirmed.

For some people, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease / Dementia is a huge shock, especially as it's not unusual for people with dementia to have less awareness of their difficulties. For others, the diagnosis can be very important in helping them and their families to make sense of symptoms they've been concerned about for a long time.

If you've just been given a diagnosis of dementia, you may be feeling numb, scared and unable to take everything in. It may be helpful to have the diagnosis explained again to help make sense of the idea over time. It might help to talk things through with family and friends, and to seek support from the **Teesside Dementia Link Services**.

It takes time to adapt to a diagnosis of dementia, for both you and your family. Some people find it helpful to seek information and plan for the future, but others may need a longer period to process the news.

However, as dementia is a progressive illness, the weeks to months after a diagnosis is often a good time to think about legal, financial and healthcare matters for the future.

**You are not alone we are here to help**

some info taken from NHS uk