

# Having memory or thinking concerns?

## Here's how to talk to your doctor.

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) is a brain condition that slowly affects memory, thinking, and daily functioning, primarily in older adults. ADRD is not the same as normal age-related memory loss, and generally affects people over 65. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia and accounts for 60-80% of dementia cases.<sup>1</sup>

*If you feel that you or a loved one is showing signs of ADRD, you should talk to your family doctor.*



### BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

**Preparing for your appointment is key to making the most of your time with your primary care physician.**

- ✔ Document your concerns and symptoms
- ✔ Review your family history
- ✔ List your medications
- ✔ Write down specific examples of memory issues you've noticed, including when the issues started, how often they occur, and how they affect your daily life.
- ✔ Note any family members with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Include their age when symptoms first appeared and any details about their diagnosis or care.
- ✔ Bring a list of all medications you are taking, including prescription medications, over the counter drugs, herbal supplements, or vitamins.
- ✔ Consider bringing a trusted friend or family member. They can help take notes, share observations, or provide support during the visit.

### DURING YOUR APPOINTMENT

**Clearly state your concerns and describe your symptoms**

For example, you may say, "I've noticed changes in my memory and thinking. I'm concerned this might be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease."



Be as specific as possible to give your physician a clear understanding of your concerns.

**Explore possible causes**

Your doctor can help rule out reversible causes and discuss risk factors.



Your provider may ask about lifestyle factors such as stress, depression, sleep quality, or other health conditions that could affect your memory. Being open with your physician about lifestyle factors, such as alcohol use, is very important.

Your doctor may order blood tests to check for treatable conditions like vitamin deficiencies or thyroid issues that can impact brain function.

Share details about any relatives with dementia and any other health information that could help your provider understand potential risks.

**Discuss diagnostic testing**

**Cognitive Assessments**

Your doctor may perform a brief in-office test or refer you to a specialist for more detailed evaluations. The test will likely include questions and tasks to evaluate memory, attention, and language abilities.



**Blood Biomarkers**

Your doctor may have access to new blood tests that detect Alzheimer's biomarkers (substances in the body that help diagnose or predict the disease). Ask if these tests are right for you based on your symptoms. Biomarker tests are quick, minimally invasive, and may be more affordable than other options for understanding if your symptoms may be caused by Alzheimer's disease.

**Imaging**

Discuss whether brain imaging tests like an MRI (a noninvasive scan that uses magnetic waves) or CT scan (a noninvasive scan that combines x-rays and computer imaging) might be useful to check for changes in your brain structure.

### AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

**Every treatment plan is personalized to your unique situation and symptoms. Common treatment plan components your doctor may recommend are:**

**Lifestyle changes**

Your doctor may suggest steps to support your brain health, such as regular physical activity, a healthy diet, cognitive stimulation (puzzles, learning new skills), social engagement with friends and family, and maintaining healthy sleep habits.



**Referral to specialists**

If needed, your physician may refer you to a neurologist (a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating brain and nervous system disorders), geriatrician (a doctor with expertise in the care and health needs of older adults), or memory care clinic for further evaluation.



**Follow-up plan**

Work with your provider to create a timeline for follow-up visits, additional tests or monitoring, and discussions around potential pharmacological interventions.



This resource is supported by a contribution from UsAgainstAlzheimer's.

**Patient Resources**  
UsAgainstAlzheimer's Brain Guide  
AAFP Cognitive Care Guide  
Alzheimer's Association

**References**  
1. "What Is Alzheimer's?" Alzheimer's Association, [www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-alzheimers](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-alzheimers). Accessed 3 Feb. 2025.

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