

What to do after a dementia diagnosis

Dementia is a progressive brain disease. Physical and mental health strongly affect brain health. If you have dementia, it's very important that you look after your body and mind.

Ask your GP or specialist to help you improve your brain health

Most people living with dementia find it helpful to bring a family member with them to the GP or specialist doctor. This person can help ask questions and take note of key information. You can also ask your doctor to write down the things you need to do.

Ask your doctor about medications for dementia

If you have Alzheimer's type dementia, ask about medications. Donepezil, Galantamine, Rivastigmine and Memantine can help stabilise memory and thinking symptoms.

Ask your doctor about driving

You need to tell the Service NSW if you have a diagnosis of dementia. You won't automatically lose your driving licence but people with dementia will need to have a driving assessment. Ask your GP about subsidised taxis and community transport services if you can no longer drive.

Ask your doctor for regular check-ups

People living with dementia find it harder to manage their health. Make regular appointments with your GP. If you're over 75 years old, Medicare funds annual GP check-ups.

Ask your doctor for a management plan

People living with dementia often have other health conditions (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure) which can make dementia worse. A care plan means that all your health conditions are regularly reviewed together and can give access to other health services.

Ask your doctor for a medication review

Some medications can make symptoms of dementia worse. If you are having trouble taking your medications correctly or take 5 or more medications, ask for a medication review. The GP will usually work with a pharmacist to make sure you're taking the right medications.

Ask your doctor about referrals for services

There are government funded services to help people living with dementia and carers. Ask your GP about multicultural community organisations which run services in your area.

We can improve brain health even after a diagnosis of dementia. Learn more from our "Ways to improve brain health" checklist.

Some people think that once they have dementia, it's better to do less, not go out, and have family care for them. But doing less means your dementia might get worse faster. Research has shown staying physically, mentally and socially active slow the progression of dementia. The brain is a muscle that needs exercise, and we exercise it by staying active.

Maintain your lifestyle to slow progression and live well

Keep socially active every week

Family and friends are the most important support for people living with dementia to live an active life. They take the person with dementia out, visit them at home, and do things they enjoy together. People with dementia should keep doing things they enjoy as part of staying active. For example, spending time with grandchildren or other family, sharing a favourite meal, hobbies and outings.

To better support people living with dementia, family and friends should learn about how to communicate and care for with the person with dementia (see Connect with services section below).

Keep physically active

Exercise can improve or maintain memory and thinking in people with dementia. It does this by helping with blood flow to the brain. Exercise also improves mood, sleep and physical health. Frail older people improve with regular exercise practice.

- Aerobic exercise raises your heart rate and breathing. Fast walking and swimming are examples of aerobic exercise.
- Strength activities help you maintain bone strength. These can be everyday activities like carrying shopping, gardening, or vacuuming.
- Balance and flexibility are important so that we can keep walking and moving from sitting to standing comfortably and safely. We don't want to fall. Tai Chi, yoga, and dancing can help with balance and flexibility.

Challenge your brain with new or varied activities every week

Keeping your brain active can also help maintain thinking and memory. People with dementia should challenge their brain by doing different types of familiar activities such as games (like Mahjong) and word puzzles (like crosswords) or number puzzles (like Sudoku). These brain activities should be enjoyable and not too difficult – the challenge is doing different types of thinking activities.

Connect with services

There are government subsidised services for people with dementia and families.

- Social groups, exercise groups, bus outings.
- Help at home (help with gardening, transport to appointments, shopping, cleaning, showers and cooking).
- Carer services (Education and support for family members (sometimes called carers)).

Care Finders are workers who speak Chinese/Arabic/Vietnamese who help older people apply for services through My Aged Care <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/>.



Visit www.facingdementiatogether.au
Call the National Dementia Helpline
1800 100 500

