

# SpeakUP™



## What you should know about memory problems and dementia

was developed in collaboration with

**Alzheimer's Association**  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

**Alzheimer's Foundation of America**  
[www.alzfdn.org](http://www.alzfdn.org)

**American Academy of Neurology**  
[www.aan.com](http://www.aan.com)

**American Psychiatric Association**  
[www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)

**Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving**  
[www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

**National Association of Social Workers**  
[www.HelpStartsHere.org](http://www.HelpStartsHere.org)

**National Gerontological Nursing Association**  
[www.ngna.org](http://www.ngna.org)

**National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health**  
[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)

## What you should know about memory problems and dementia

The Joint Commission is the largest health care accrediting body in the United States that promotes quality and safety.

*Helping health care organizations help patients*

It is perfectly normal to forget things once in a while. However, forgetting how to use keys, make a phone call, or find your way home may be a sign of a more serious memory problem. This brochure gives you facts about memory problems and dementia, when to seek help, questions to ask your doctor or other health care providers, and advice for family members.

## Memory problems

Aging affects your body and your brain. Typical forgetfulness that comes with normal aging includes:

- Sometimes forgetting which word to use
- Misplacing things from time to time
- Taking longer to learn new things

## When should you be concerned about memory problems?

When memory problems interfere with your daily life, you should seek help. Talk to a doctor if you've had repeated problems with:

- Knowing what day or season it is
- Remembering the name of a close family member or friend
- Getting lost in a familiar location
- Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them
- Managing your money
- People mentioning that you are more forgetful

## What causes memory problems?

Memory problems can be caused by many things. Some can be reversed if you get treatment soon enough. That is why it is important to see a doctor if you are having problems. Causes include:

- Certain medicines
- Stress, anxiety or depression
- Urinary tract or other infections
- Thyroid, kidney or liver problems
- Low levels of vitamin B-12
- Serious lack of food or water
- Head injury
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Stroke
- Some brain diseases
- Acute and chronic illnesses

## Should a family member or friend go with you to the doctor?

Yes! You should ask a trusted family member or friend to go with you to your doctor's visit. They can be your advocate. Your advocate can help you ask questions, take notes, describe symptoms, and remember instructions. They can give the doctor an idea of how you are doing at home. Your advocate is there to support you. You are the center of the conversation.

## What will your doctor do?

Your doctor will give you a physical exam, may order tests, or refer you to another health care professional. The doctor may ask:

- What memory problems are you having?
- How often and when do you have them?
- What are your current and past medical conditions?
- What medicines are you taking? Include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and supplements.
- Has your health, memory or mood changed? How?
- Is there a family history of dementia? What about Huntington's or Parkinson's disease?

## What should you or your advocate ask the doctor?

There will be a lot to talk about with your doctor, so be prepared. Write down your symptoms. Include examples of your memory problems. Make a list of recent life changes or major stressors. Ask:

- What might be causing your symptoms? Could it be medicines or other conditions?
- What tests will be needed?
- Should you see a specialist?

## Dementia

Dementia is a decline or worsening of thinking, memory and reasoning skills. Dementia interferes with a person's daily life and activities. Sometimes there will be personality changes or unusual behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia.

## If you are told you have dementia, ask:

- What changes can you expect over time?
- Are there medicines or treatments that can slow, reverse or cure your symptoms? What are the possible risks, benefits and side effects?
- Will you be referred to a specialist, such as a neurologist? This is a doctor who treats diseases of the brain.
- Should you limit or get help with any activities? This could include driving, taking medicines or paying bills.
- How often should you see the doctor?
- Can other health care professionals, such as nurses and social workers, help?
- What local resources or support services can help you and your family?
- Can you participate in a drug trial? What are the possible risks, benefits and side effects?

## Why is it important to know that you have dementia?

The most important reason is that the cause may be treatable. Finding the cause of your dementia and getting appropriate treatment can allow you to:

- Try treatments that may provide some relief of symptoms and help you remain independent longer
- Build the right care team and social support network
- Participate in decisions about your care, living options, financial, legal, and end-of-life matters

## How can your family members or friends help?

Family members or friends can help you be active, stay connected, and live as normally as possible. They can also:

- Educate themselves about dementia and community resources
- Learn new caregiving skills as your condition progresses
- Check your home for safety issues
- Find and join a support group
- Help you remember that there will be good days and bad days
- Set up reminders, such as:
  - Big calendars to highlight important dates and events
  - A list of the plans for each day
  - Directions for using common household items
- Let other people help when they offer to do something
- Make sure they take care of themselves

## Where can you find more information?

10 warning signs of Alzheimer's: [www.alz.org/alzheimers\\_disease\\_10\\_signs\\_of\\_alzheimers.asp#signs](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_10_signs_of_alzheimers.asp#signs)

NIH Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center: [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers), 1-800-438-4380

Elder care locator: [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)

Memory screening: [www.nationalmemoryscreening.org](http://www.nationalmemoryscreening.org)

[www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)