



California Central Coast Chapter

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Diagnosed With Dementia: Now What?

When you learn a loved one has been diagnosed with dementia, short-term memory loss, or mild cognitive impairment, you may feel afraid and confused. You might have many questions such as What? Why my mother? or Why my husband?

But one very important question to ask is was the assessment from the doctor thorough enough? An extensive evaluation is vital when diagnosing dementia to rule out any other potential causes of the dementia, including stroke, thyroid problems, drug interactions, chronic alcoholism, vitamin efficiencies and psychiatric disorders such as depression.

A neurologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating disorders of the brain. Although there is not one single test that can diagnose Alzheimer's disease, a trained physician can be 80-90 percent accurate of the diagnose, if a full assessment is done.

A full assessment typically includes obtaining knowledge of the person's medical and psychiatric history, a neurological and physical exam, lab tests, a mental status exam, evaluation of daily activity abilities, brain scans and psychological testing.

The neurologist may find a brain scan to be beneficial in checking for and ruling out tumors, strokes, head trauma or the build-up of fluids surrounding the brain.

You may now be asking yourself, why would I put my loved one through all of these tests if the primary doctor has already confirmed dementia?



There are several reasons to pursue a thorough diagnosis. Besides ruling out other causes of memory loss, a full assessment can ensure your loved one is accurately diagnosed with the correct form of dementia. It is important to know what type or types of dementia your loved one has to properly treat the disease and its symptoms.

Again, there are many other disorders that can cause dementia and memory loss. For example, vascular dementia is considered to be the second-most prevalent type of dementia and is caused by reduced blood flow to the brain, often due to a stroke.


Another reason to pursue an early and accurate diagnosis is that it allows the person with dementia to be involved. Once a diagnosis of dementia is made, there are many legal, safety and long-term plans that should be made. Early diagnosis allows the person with dementia to be involved in the decisions regarding their own future.


It's possible that you're now convinced to seek a full assessment from a neurologist. So what is the next step? Find a neurologist and schedule an appointment.


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Caregiver Tips


Communicating with a person who has a diagnosis of dementia


 Understand that communication styles need to be changed when interacting with a person with dementia

 Avoid arguing

 Don't talk about the person as if he or she weren't there

 Be patient and give support

 Avoid criticism and correcting

 Focus on feelings, not the facts

 Talk slow and clear



You can find Caregiver Monday tips every Monday at 10 a.m. on Facebook ([facebook.com/AlzCentral](https://www.facebook.com/AlzCentral)), Twitter (@AlzCoast) and on LinkedIn ([linkedin.com/company/alzheimer's-association-california-central-chapter](https://www.linkedin.com/company/alzheimer's-association-california-central-chapter)).

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When visiting a neurologist, be prepared. The doctor may ask questions about what kinds of symptoms have been occurring, when the symptoms began, how often they happen, and if they have gotten worse. Also, be prepared with a list of all your loved one's medications, including vitamins, herbal supplements and past medications.

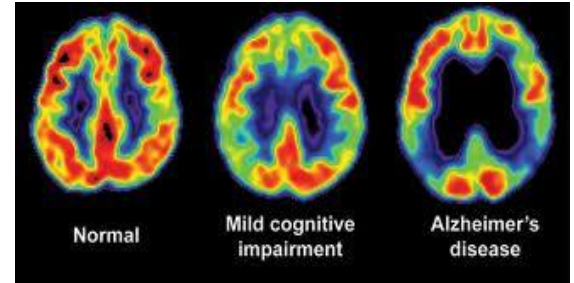
Some potential questions you may want to ask the neurologist include:

- What tests will be conducted and how long will it take to get an official diagnosis?
- What should be expected if it is Alzheimer's disease?
- What are the available treatments?

To ensure a dignified diagnosis, always include the person with dementia in the diagnostic process. Tell the truth about the diagnosis, and take their concerns seriously. Be sure the diagnosis is delivered in plain but sensitive language.

Remember, dementia is not a normal part of aging. Typical age-related changes would include sometimes forgetting a name or appointment, but remembering them later. A person with dementia would not remember them later.

If your loved one is showing some or any



of the following signs, then it's time to have a conversation with the doctor to seek a medical evaluation.

10 Warning Signs of Dementia

1. Memory changes that disrupt daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships, such as distance and perception.
6. New problems with works in speaking and writing
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Change in mood or personality

By Justine Meador, Care Specialist
Alzheimer's Association California Central Chapter

Resources:

- **Alzheimer's disease: The Basics** brochure available in local office or online alz.org/alzheimers_disease_publications_alz_basics.asp
- Alzheimer's Association, *Alzheimer's & Dementia* tab at alz.org
- National Institute on Aging, **Alzheimer's Disease Education Center** visit nia.nih.gov/alzheimers
- National Institute on Aging, **Talking with Your Doctor**, nia.nih.gov/health/publication/talking-your-doctor-guide-older-people
- **What Now?** - book available at our local office or on line at alz.org/cacentral/documents/wn_web.pdf