

# Communicating with Health Care Professionals

Physicians and other medical professionals play a central role on a person with dementia's care team — a group of people that often includes family, friends and other individuals who work together to ensure the best care possible. Effective communication is important among the entire care team, particularly when meeting with health care providers, as it can help ensure comfort in asking questions and expressing needs and concerns.

## Advice for the person with dementia

### Prepare for visits

The following can be helpful as you prepare for a visit with a health care professional:

- Document any changes in health, including mood, memory and behaviors, and any questions that should be addressed at the next appointment
- Make note of any progress you have noticed since your last appointment
- Create a list of current prescriptions and over-the-counter medications
- Write down any vitamins or supplements added to the medication regimen

### Ask questions

Whether you are newly diagnosed or experiencing recent changes, it's normal to have questions about the disease, and it's common to forget what you'd like to ask a doctor. Consider bringing a list of questions to each appointment so that you are prepared to discuss. Also, be sure to let the physician or other medical professionals know if you need additional information or clarification.

The Alzheimer's Association National Early-Stage Advisory Group – comprising men and women from across the country living with early-stage Alzheimer's or other dementias – developed a list of questions

to help others make the most of doctor visits. These questions may be helpful as you create your own list to share with the doctor.

### Diagnosis

- What test(s) or tools were used to determine the diagnosis?
- Can symptoms be attributed to any other causes?
- How will the disease progress?
- How will the diagnosis impact daily health or other pre-existing conditions?

### Treatments

- What treatment options are available?
- Which symptoms are being targeted by each medication?
- Are there alternative treatments available?
- How will the effectiveness of each treatment be measured?
- Are there any possible side effects?
- Is one treatment option more likely than another to interfere with medications for other conditions?

### Clinical Studies

- What clinical studies are available?
- Is published information about clinical treatment studies available?
- What are the possible risks and benefits for participation in a clinical study based on my medical history?

### Health care team

- How familiar are you with Alzheimer's Disease?
- Who will be responsible for overseeing my care moving forward?

- If hospitalization is necessary, will you be able to provide care in this setting?
- How frequently will follow-up appointments be scheduled?
- Under what circumstances should I contact you?
- Who else might be recommended as a member of my care team (e.g., specialist, counselor)? What would their roles be?
- At what point will you consider me unable to make my own health care decisions?
- How will you work with my care team during the course of the disease? What information will be shared?

## Care and support

- What resources and support services are available to learn more about the diagnosis and help me live well with the disease for as long as possible?
- Are there any lifestyles changes that may help me continue to live well with the disease?

## Advice for care partners

### In the early stage

While in the early stage of Alzheimer's, the person should be included in all conversations regarding care and encouraged to independently share any health-related observations with the physician and other members of the medical team. If you need to help interpret any changing needs, you may want to ask before interjecting.

At this point, you may want to ask the person with dementia to sign a release of information so that you can freely communicate with the doctor on the person's behalf when the disease becomes more advanced.

### As the disease advances

Over time, as the person's needs change and ability to communicate declines, the care team should consider what adjustments to make in order to ensure good health care. The team will also need to provide any updates on behalf of the person with dementia in order to maintain accurate health records that are accessible in case of emergency.



## How to Contact the Alzheimer's Association – Heart of America Chapter 1.800.272.3900 • [alz.org/kansascity](http://alz.org/kansascity)

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