



I think my loved one is developing dementia - what should I do?

Many conditions have similar symptoms to dementia, so it should never be assumed that someone has dementia just because some symptoms are present. Strokes, infections, depression, nutritional deficiencies and brain tumours can all cause dementia-like symptoms. Many of these other conditions can be treated.

A correct diagnosis is important

It is critical to consult a doctor as early as possible. Your doctor will arrange a complete medical assessment which may identify a treatable condition, or it may confirm the presence of dementia.

An assessment may include the following:

- **Medical history**- the doctor will ask about current and past medical issues, family medical history, any medications being taken and problems with memory, thinking or behaviours that are causing concern. It may be useful for the doctor to also speak with a close family member who can help provide all the necessary information.
- **Physical examination**- May include tests for heart and lung function, mobility and the senses, to help rule out other conditions.
- **Laboratory tests**- including blood and urine tests to identify possible illness which might account for the symptoms.
- **Cognitive testing**- a variety of tests used to assess memory, language and problem solving. This can help identify specific problem areas, which in turn can help identify the type or cause of dementia.
- **Brain Scans**- Certain scans looking at the brain structure can rule out tumours, clots or haemorrhages as causes of symptoms and can detect patterns of brain tissue damage that can differentiate between different types of dementia.
- **Psychiatric Assessment**- can identify treatable disorders such as depression and to manage symptoms such as anxiety or delusions that may occur along with dementia.

The best place to start is with the person's doctor. Following screening tests, the doctor may give a preliminary diagnosis or may refer the person to a specialist.

Some people may not realise that there is anything wrong with them or may be in denial and resistive to going to their doctor or they may be fearful of their future. It is then useful to find another reason for visiting the doctor. For example, make time for your loved one to have a physical check-up.

If the person is still resistive:

- Talk to the doctor and ask for advice.
- Contact your local Aged Care Assessment Team on 1800 200 422.
- Contact the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500

If you have further questions about our services or would just like to speak with someone, we are very happy for you to contact the Southern Cross Care (WA) Inc. Dementia Centre of Excellence team. Please call Southern Cross Care (WA) Inc. on 1300 669 189.

Dementia Centre of Excellence