



Diagnosing Dementia

Early professional diagnosis of Dementia gives the person with the condition and those close to them the best chance to prepare and plan for their future. With treatment and support, many people are able to lead active, fulfilling lives.

Your GP will ask about symptoms and other aspects of your health, and will do a physical examination. The doctor will arrange for some blood tests to be taken to check the overall health level and rule out other conditions which may be responsible for symptoms such as thyroid hormones. They will ask about any medication you may be taking which could cause symptoms similar to Dementia and ask questions or mental exercises to measure any problems with memory or clarity of thought.

A series of exercises commonly used to help a doctor assess mental abilities can include remembering a short list of objects; writing a grammatically correct short sentence and correctly giving the current day of the week, followed by the date, month, season and year. These exercises do not diagnose Dementia but can give an indication of any impairment.

Dementia can be difficult to diagnose, especially if symptoms are mild. If unsure, the GP may refer their patient to a specialist such as a neurologist who is an expert in treating conditions affecting the brain and nervous system; or an elderly care doctor or a psychiatrist with experience of treating Dementia.

It's important to make the best use of your time with the specialist and if possible attend your appointment with a relative or friend. They can help make a note of what you want to ask and what the specialist said. The specialist may arrange for more diagnostic tests.

When all the test results come back the doctor should ask if you would like to know the diagnosis and whether anyone else should be told.