



About Alzheimer's

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Alzheimer's Disease Info

Questions to Ask the Doctor

As we age, we experience many physical and mental changes. Many of these changes are just a part of normal aging, but sometimes, they may be an indicator of a more serious condition. One thing that people with memory problems often fear is that they have Alzheimer's disease - one form of dementia. However, there are many health conditions which mimic the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease but are treatable.

The questions below are designed to help you talk with your doctor about all of the possible causes of your memory loss symptoms, especially those which are treatable, before you and your doctor settle on a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

Ask Your Doctor About:

1. **Possible Medication Interactions** - If you take even two medications, you may be experiencing dizziness, memory loss, or other symptoms due to medication interactions.
  - Make a list (print it & you can use the form below) and be sure to tell your physician about all substances you are taking, including:

Prescription Medications:

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Vitamins:

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Herbal supplements:

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Over the counter products (such as aspirin and cold medicine):

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Smoking cessation products:

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Water and weight loss products:

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Topical Items (such as arthritis ointment, athlete's foot treatment, etc.):

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Other Items:

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Additional Topics

- ▶ Help! Where to Find It
- ▶ Latest Research
- ▶ Choosing a Doctor (Medline Plus)

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- Be sure to be thorough, because even things that we don't think about (such as arthritis ointment) can contain substances that can cause problems for some people.
  - Your doctor may need to work with you over time or may need to change your prescriptions and over the counter products in order to rule out medication interactions. Of course, this may not solve your problem, but it is an important thing to rule out.

1. **Effect of Weight Loss/Gain & Medications** - If you have recently gained or lost even 10 pounds, you should ask your doctor to check your medication levels.

- Some medications are prescribed according to our weight and losing or gaining weight may mean that you have too much or too little medication in your body for your size, and you may experience a variety of symptoms that mimic dementia.
- Use the list above and share it with your physician.
- Be sure to alert your doctor to weight changes and have them adjust your medications if necessary.

2. **Symptoms from Dehydration** - If you are dehydrated or malnourished, your body may not be processing your medications correctly.

- You probably know that water is an important element in our bodies. Water is also necessary for our body to digest food and to dissolve and metabolize medications properly. However, many of us do not get enough water and dehydration among older adults is common.
- In talking with your doctor about your symptoms, be sure to alert your physician of any bouts of diarrhea, vomiting, and heat exhaustion you have recently experienced.
- Ask your physician to ensure that you are not dehydrated, because if you are, the medications in your system may be more concentrated than appropriate and your body may not be metabolizing your medicines correctly.
- If you are dehydrated, your physician will work with you to ensure proper hydration and that your medication levels are appropriate.

3. **Falls & Concussions** - If you have fallen or hit your head recently, you could have a concussion which can result in sudden memory loss, dizziness, etc.

- Although you may not realize it, a recent fall or serious bump on the head may be the cause of your memory problems. Falls among older adults are common and sometimes, people fall and do not know if they hit their head or even if they were unconscious for any period of time.
- Be sure to tell your doctor about any recent falls or serious bumps on your head so that your doctor can rule out concussions and other potential problems that can arise from such events.
- Your doctor may do a series of tests to see if there is anything that needs to be done and if so, he/she will do what is necessary to address the problem.

4. **Depression** - Depression is a common problem among older adults and affects as many as one in five older people. The symptoms of depression are remarkably similar to those of dementia.

- Physicians often mistake depression for dementia, so be sure to ask for specific tests to rule out

depression. Blood tests and neurological and psychological evaluations are generally necessary to rule out depression.

- Depression can have many different triggers such as loss, significant life changes, and side effects of medications. Your physician should address all possible underlying causes of depression.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a depression screening, as many older people experience the symptoms of depression but are unaware that they have a treatable condition.
- Remember that depression is treatable, so be sure that your physician checks for depression prior to providing a diagnosis of dementia.

5. **Alcohol Use** - Consuming too much alcohol, or drinking alcohol while taking certain medications may result in symptoms of memory loss.

- Be sure to tell your physician if you drink alcohol on a regular basis, or if you experienced symptoms after an occasional drink.
- Use the list above to advise your physician of any medications and treatments you use.
- Carefully follow your physician's advice in regards to the use of alcohol.

We hope that this document is helpful in speaking with your doctor about all of the possible causes of your memory problems. After considering the various treatable conditions that often mimic the symptoms of dementia, your physician may determine that a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease is correct. If you are diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, you may wish to contact your [State or Area Agency on Aging](#) or the [local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association](#) for assistance in coping with Alzheimer's disease.

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