

# Talking To A Loved One About Memory Loss

It's not unusual for someone experiencing cognitive decline to be hesitant to talk about it until a caregiver or loved one raises the subject. But it doesn't have to be an uncomfortable conversation. By bringing it up early, you can help them take more control of their situation by consulting a doctor, monitoring symptoms and planning for the future.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

## You Can Take Action

**Having an honest conversation about memory loss and Alzheimer's may not always be easy, but try these approaches to help make it more compassionate and constructive:**

**Start early.** If you notice memory loss or other signs of Alzheimer's, don't put off the conversation. Talking about the situation as soon as possible is one of the best ways to make sure a loved one gets the help they need, when they need it. You don't even have to wait to notice symptoms to start the dialogue, especially if there's a family history of Alzheimer's. Raising the topic early can help everyone be more prepared in case symptoms develop or grow more noticeable later.

**Choose the right time, place and people.** Plan to have the conversation at a time your loved one feels comfortable, in an environment that won't put them on the defensive. If there's another trusted family member or friend whose opinion they value, you might consider asking them to participate.

**Think about what to say beforehand.** With conversations like this, it's better not to "wing it." Prepare for the conversation by thinking about specific examples of changes you or others have noticed and why they concern you. You can start the conversation by talking about these changes, then asking the person if they've noticed the changes, too, or by simply asking how they feel.

**Be ready to ask questions... and listen.** As you're talking with your loved one, try to understand what they've noticed, how they feel, and what other factors might be causing the changes. If you feel it's the right time, you might also ask them questions about their preferences for medical care, caregiving, or legal and

financial issues if cognitive decline continues.

**Stay patient.** Don't be thrown off if your loved one becomes angry, frustrated, or denies any changes. Be prepared for these reactions and remain patient during the conversation. If you need to, take a break and try picking up the conversation again at a later time, when emotions have cooled off.

**Encourage a doctor's office visit.** Explain why getting symptoms checked early can put your loved one in a better position if medical help is needed. If you're comfortable doing so, offer to go with them to the doctor – it might be just the moral support they need to follow through.

**Make it an ongoing conversation.** Once your observations and concerns are out in the open, you don't need to resolve everything in just one conversation. Leave the door open for follow-up conversations to ask about any changes, make sure they're seeing a doctor and, if needed, to start planning for care and other issues.

1. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/noticing-memory-problems-what-do-next>

2. <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/memory-loss-concerns>

3. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/alzheimers-disease/get-family-alzheimers-conversation-started-earlier-better/>