

# The Steps Towards a Diagnosis

Once you've noticed memory changes in you or your loved one, understanding and diagnosing the cause is a very important part of slowing progression and maintaining brain health. If you or a loved one are diagnosed with MCI, Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, early diagnosis can be instrumental in making sure you get all the necessary support, resources and planning time.

## You Can Take Action

**It can often take multiple doctor visits and tests to find the cause of memory changes. This makes it important to stay patient and keep trying. You can expect several steps in the process:** <sup>1,2,3</sup>

**Start the conversation with your doctor.** If you've noticed memory changes that affect your day-to-day activities, make an appointment to discuss them with your primary care doctor. If you've noticed these changes to a loved one's memory, you can encourage them to talk about the topic with their doctor. Or, you can offer to go with them to the doctor and describe what you've noticed.

**Complete cognitive tests.** After you've described these memory changes, your doctor may give you one or more tests in their office to check your brain health. These cognitive tests often include a series of questions or activities to check on your attention, focus, problem-solving, counting, or language.

**Take blood or urine tests.** Your doctor may also order tests for your blood and urine. These tests can't say whether a person has Alzheimer's, but they can help to identify other conditions that might be causing the problem.

**Follow up with specialists.** Your family doctor may refer you to a doctor who specializes in memory, cognitive decline or older adults. Sometimes you may have to wait longer or

travel farther for an appointment to see these specialists, but it's important to follow through. Specialists are trained experts in this area and may often be able to notice or diagnose things that would not be apparent to your family doctor. It may take multiple referrals before you get an answer, but it's important to see this process through.

**Take MRI, PET, or CSF tests.** Eventually, a doctor may recommend you get a more advanced medical test, like a computed tomography (CT) scan, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, a positron emission tomography (PET) scan, or a cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) test. These tests are safe, minimally invasive, and could play an important role in reaching a diagnosis.

**Receiving your diagnosis.** After completing some or all of the steps listed above, your doctor or doctors may be able to diagnose the cause of your or loved one's brain health issues. If the diagnosis is Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, it's important to know early so that you and your loved ones can plan ahead and begin to get the right support, help and care.

1. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/how-alzheimers-disease-diagnosed>  
2. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9164-alzheimers-disease/diagnosis-and-tests>  
3. <https://alzfdn.org/memory-screening/what-is-memory-screening/>