



Getting help for forgetfulness

Forgetfulness is common, particularly as we get older. Often this is nothing to worry about.

However, forgetfulness that interferes with your daily life is not a normal part of getting older.

“I used to leave the keys in the door. Sometimes I forget that I am cooking and I just go.”

Regardless of your age, frequent memory lapses could be a sign of physical illness, stress or dementia.

If you or someone you know is more forgetful lately, it is important to see your GP.

Why go to your GP?

The earlier you see your doctor the sooner you can get help if you need it, or be reassured if nothing is wrong.

Members of the Black community spoke of their reasons for not going to the doctor with memory concerns:

“When it comes to the GP... [and] you think it could just be a mild problem... you would just feel that you’re wasting the GP’s time.”

You will not be wasting their time as talking to your GP is the first point of contact for a referral to a memory specialist.

“All he’s going to do is probably give me tablets or whatever it is.”

Normally, your GP won’t immediately prescribe medication for your memory but they can do some blood and memory tests.

“If I ask for help, I’m taken away from my own home.”

If your doctor suspects you may have significant memory problems they can refer you to a memory clinic whose role is to keep people at home and provide help to maintain independence.

“This is a white, old white peoples’ disease, it’s not seen as black people have dementia.”

Unfortunately, black people in the UK are more likely to develop dementia at an earlier age. So the earlier you seek help the better.

What is dementia?

Dementia is usually caused by disease in the brain. It is a physical illness like diabetes or arthritis that affects people of all ethnicities.

It is more common as you get older but most older people do not have it as it is not a natural part of aging.

Usually, dementia gradually gets worse, causing problems with:

- Memory
- Carrying out everyday tasks, like handling money and finding directions
- Communication – difficulties finding the right word
- Paying attention and concentrating
- Changes in personality and mood

There are many types of dementia such as Alzheimer’s disease and vascular dementia. Currently, most can not be cured, but like diabetes or arthritis, there are treatments available that can help maintain independence and choices.



What can memory services do to help?

GP appointments are short but you can ask to be referred to memory services. They assess and diagnose or tell you that you do not have dementia.

Memory services have more time to listen and discuss options with you. They can provide:

- Support groups and treatments to improve your memory
- Strategies for caring for a relative
- Help planning for the future
- Information about local services and facilities to help you and your family

Some people think that families should do everything, but memory services can help families care better for an older relative.

All discussions with your GP or the specialist are completely confidential so there is no need to be concerned about privacy.

You may find it helpful to bring someone you trust, such as a relative or a close friend with you to the appointment.



Key points:

- **Forgetfulness is a valid reason to seek help from your GP. You are not wasting their time.**
- **The earlier you seek help the better.**
- **Talking to your GP is confidential.**
- **Being forgetful doesn't necessarily mean that you have dementia.**
- **You can ask to be referred to memory services. Don't wait for a crisis.**
- **Memory services will spend more time with you and help you decide what to do.**
- **Memory services may offer talking treatment, medication, advice about money and legal matters.**



Where to find more information?

You can find more information about dementia on the internet or national helplines. We recommend some below.

Contacts:

Alzheimer's Society helpline:
0845 300 0336

Age UK Advice:
0800 169 6565

Admiral Nursing DIRECT:
0845 257 9406

or email: direct@dementiauk.org

For information about the symptoms of dementia, visit the NHS website at:
<http://nhs.uk/dementia>

For advice on living with dementia and care and support available in your area, see the Alzheimer's Society website at:
<http://alzheimers.org.uk>

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