

**FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

Dementia

Patient Q&A for general practice

This factsheet covers questions commonly asked by patients living with dementia and their families.

These questions support the booklet

[Living with dementia on the North Coast](#),

developed by Healthy North Coast and tailored to the North Coast region.

This factsheet has been written for general practice clinical teams and forms part of the Healthy North Coast Primary Care Impact (PCI) resources for dementia. We encourage general practice staff to review the PCI before meeting with the patient and to work through the booklet with the patient over a few appointments.

What does this diagnosis mean?

Everyone experiences dementia differently. Explain the specific disease, for example, Alzheimer's Disease or vascular dementia, relevant to the patient.

Dementia is generally progressive, with symptoms beginning slowly and gradually worsening over time.

There is currently no cure for dementia, but there is a lot to be done to prepare to live with the disease.

The booklet will take you through these steps.

Resources:

[HealthPathways – Dementia and cognitive impairment](#)

Are there any treatments or medications available?

GPs can prescribe dementia-specific medications in consultation with specialists. Other medications, such as cholinesterase inhibitors, may contribute to the management of the disease.

Resources:

[HealthPathways - Medications for dementia](#)

- provides a good outline of current practice.

[Dementia Australia patient help sheet](#)

- provides medication information for people living with dementia.

Dementia | Patient Q&A for general practice

Can I take over-the-counter medications as well?

This question may come up as there are a few expensive alternative therapies being promoted for dementia e.g. [Souvenaid](#). There is no literature that proves that Souvenaid makes a difference to the treatment of the disease; however, its ingredients may provide nutritional supplements.

Resources:

| [Better Health Channel – Medicines and side effects](#)

How do I plan for the future? Do I need an advance care directive, enduring power of attorney, enduring guardianships, wills? Where will I live?

It is important for health practitioners to actively encourage people diagnosed with dementia to plan early, while they are cognitively capable of making their own decisions and choices known to families.

The booklet guides families through helpful information to prepare, including end-of-life decisions about place of death, and lists of local palliative care and residential aged care services that will assist.

General practice teams are encouraged to make appointments to upload advance care directives into My Health Record to support holistic healthcare and understand the person's choices.

Resources:

| [HealthPathways - Advance care planning](#)

Can I still drive?

A person with dementia must inform Transport for NSW (TNSW) and their motor vehicle insurance company of their diagnosis. GPs can provide a driving assessment, and people may be able to hold a licence with certain conditions. Fitness to drive will need to be reviewed every six to 12 months.

Resources:

| [HealthPathways - Driver assessment of patients with cognitive impairment and dementia](#)

| [Living with dementia on the North Coast – Step 6. Staying safe](#)

How might dementia affect my work life now and in the future?

Many people in the early stages of dementia may still be able to work and volunteer, depending on the type of work and the areas of the brain that are affected. Encourage the patient to talk to their employer to determine if adjustments can be made to allow the patient to work safely.

Resources:

| [Dementia Australia - Making employment decisions help sheet](#)

What support is available?

Refer to [Living with dementia on the North Coast Step 5. Staying healthy and active](#) for information about social groups in your areas. *Step 4. Planning your future* details how to access services that can support the patient to live at home.

Resources:

| [HealthPathways - Social and community support](#)

Dementia | Patient Q&A for general practice

How can I keep as healthy as possible – mentally, physically and socially?

The response to this question is no different to any preventative health response - diet and hydration, physical activity, immunisations, hearing and vision checks, pharmacology reviews and all other good health and wellbeing practices.

Resources:

[Dementia Australia - Keeping involved and active help sheet](#)

[Dementia Australia - Encourage a brain-healthy diet help sheet](#)

[HealthPathways - Healthy lifestyle support](#)

[HealthPathways - Falls prevention programs](#)

Can I get a chronic disease management plan?

All patients diagnosed with dementia are encouraged to have a chronic disease management plan. The contribution of allied health - particularly occupational therapists, and in the later stages, speech pathologists - enhances quality of life and keeps people living with dementia at home longer.

Resources:

[HealthPathways - Chronic disease management items](#)

Should I have a Home Medicines Review (HMR)?

HMRs are a useful tool for busy GPs. Registered pharmacists delivering the services will assist with patient education, drug interactions and, where indicated, will provide advice on de-prescribing.

Resources:

[HealthPathways - Medication management services](#)

Should I get a referral to a specialist?

Specialist support with diagnosis, driving assessments and medication prescribing, particularly where it is mixed dementia. The range of specialists available locally and indications for referral are outlined in [HealthPathways](#). Depending on the reason, referrals can be made directly to a geriatrician, neurologist, psychogeriatrician, general physician or palliative care clinician.

What supports are there for families and friends?

There is a range of supports outlined in the booklet in [Step 1. Who can I talk with?](#) Practitioners are encouraged to support carers to take a break during the later stages of the disease through respite offerings, whether day respite or a stay in a residential aged care home.

Resources:

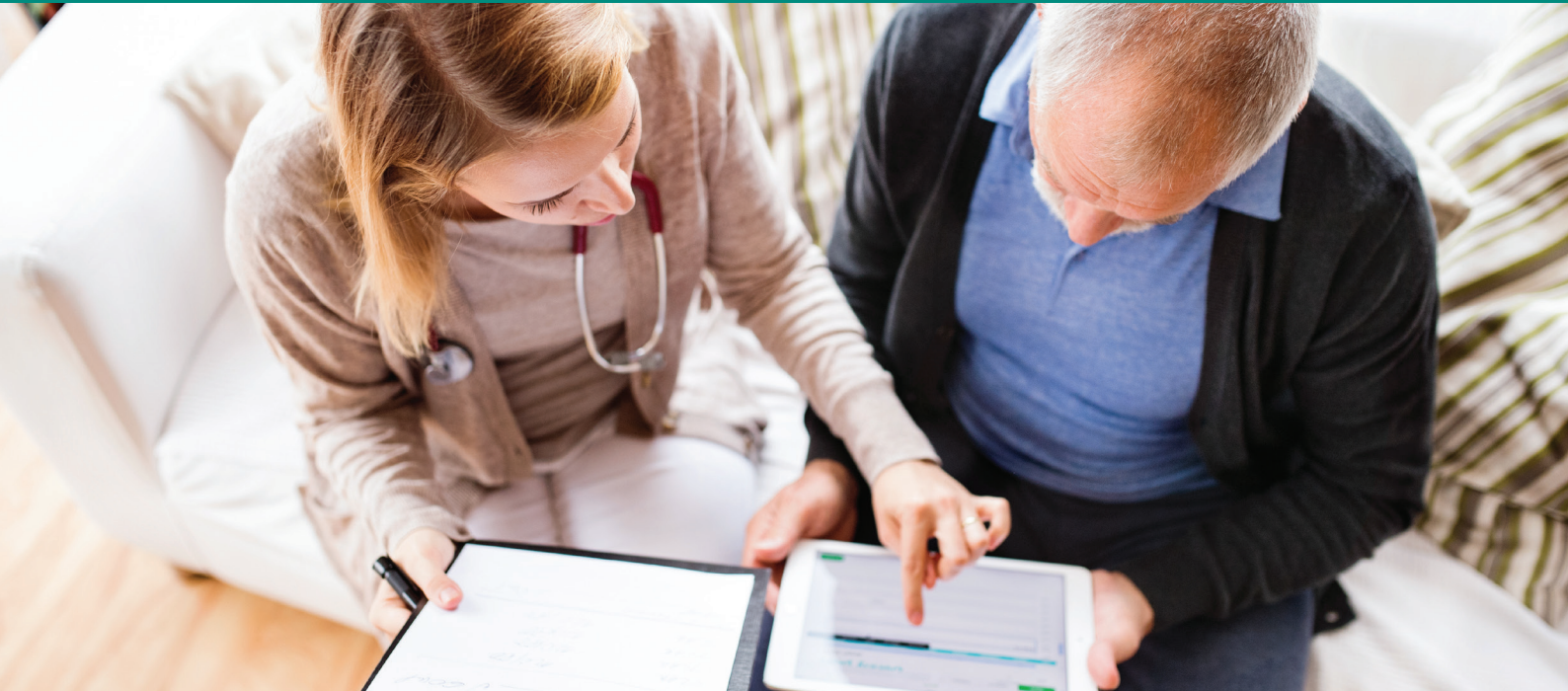
[HealthPathways - Carer support](#)

[HealthPathways - Carer stress](#)

When is my next appointment?

It is important to have regular appointments scheduled, especially for the first six to 12 months after diagnosis. Monitoring for deterioration will enable earlier referrals and reduce presentations to emergency departments, hospitalisations, and early admission into a residential aged care facility.

Dementia | Patient Q&A for general practice



Other points that may come up during appointments

Can people living with dementia sign legal documents?

It is up to the solicitor approached to undertake the work to consider if a person has capacity to sign legal documents. In general, however, people living with dementia are encouraged to have their enduring power of attorney (POA) and enduring guardian (EG) appointed, which will enable joint signatures between EGs and POAs with the patient.

Resources:

[HealthPathways - Dementia and cognitive impairment - Management 1.](#)

Is there any research happening to help?

Yes, there is a lot of research occurring globally. Two Australian organisations are [Dementia Australia Research Foundation](#) and [Wicking Institute Dementia Centre](#).

How can I access the carer allowance and taxi subsidy scheme?

The patient and their families may be able to access financial support through Services Australia. A taxi subsidy is also available.

Resources:

[Living with dementia on the North Coast](#)

[HealthPathways - Dementia and cognitive impairment - Management 14.](#)



Learn more:
hnc.org.au/PCIdementia