



**How do you  
discover dementia?**





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**In this article, you can read about how changes in behaviour and personality may be early signs of dementia and why it is important to contact the doctor if dementia is suspected.**

***Many associate Alzheimer's and other dementia disorders with memory problems. However, new research shows that forgetfulness and memory loss are not necessarily the earliest signs of dementia.***

## **Changes in behaviour and personality**

A Canadian research team noticed that many people with dementia disorders experienced changes in their behaviour and personality several years before they started having problems with their memory.

However, not many people think of dementia if memory is not also affected. For this reason, the early signs of Alzheimer's and other dementia disorders are often overlooked. The sooner the diagnosis is made, the more good years the person with dementia can look forward to. It is therefore important to take note of changes in behaviour and personality, because they may be the first warning of the onset of dementia. It is a good idea to contact the doctor if a person loses interest in friends and family, becomes less active, or stops taking an interest in a favourite sport or hobby.

Canadian researchers have developed a list of questions that can be used to spot behavioural changes that may be early signs of dementia.

Examples of questions from the list are:

- Has the person lost interest in friends, family or activities?
- Has the person become more nervous or worried about things that are routine – for example events and visits?
- Has the person starting to talk about very personal or private things in public?
- Has the person become more aggressive, irritable or temperamental?
- Does the person see him or herself as a burden on the family?
- Has the person changed eating habits (overeating, big mouthfuls, only eating certain foods, or eating food in a certain order)?
- Has the person begun to be afraid of other people (afraid that others will hurt them, steal their things or that they are in danger)?

Note that several of the questions on the Canadian researchers' list can also reveal signs of depression, which are often confused with dementia in the early stages. Dementia disorders are incurable, while depression can often be treated with good results.

## **It is important to get a diagnosis**

It is important to contact your doctor if you suspect that you or a relative may have a dementia disorder. In addition to the questions from the Canadian researchers, the list of 10 warning signs of dementia can also be used to spot symptoms of dementia.



The doctor will carry out the examinations required to make a diagnosis. The diagnosis is important for several reasons:

1. Behavioural changes and memory loss may be caused by many other things and not just a dementia disorder, including depression, cancer, infections, metabolism problems, vitamin deficiency and the side effects of medication. Some of these things can be treated so that the symptoms disappear.
2. If someone has a dementia disorder, it is possible to treat some of the symptoms such as anxiety, depression or seeing visions.
3. Different diseases are treated with different types of medicine. In the case of Alzheimer's disease, there are four types of medicine which can help with the symptoms: Donepezil, rivastigmine and galantamine and memantine. Unfortunately, none of the four medicines can cure Alzheimer's disease, but the symptoms can be alleviated, meaning the person with dementia can enjoy a better life for longer. If you do not suffer from Alzheimer's disease but have developed dementia as a result of a disease in the blood vessels of the brain, you can take medicines that can prevent new bleeding or blood clots in the brain.
4. The person with dementia and the relatives will be able to find better information and support once they have a definite diagnosis. The diagnosis may also help relatives to provide the proper care.
5. Once there is a diagnosis, it is easier to get home help, aids and devices, and other support from the municipality and region.

