

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO IS WORRIED ABOUT MEMORY

A Guide for Family and Friends

When someone worries about developing dementia, reassurance alone may not settle the fear. Your calm presence can help the person feel heard while still supporting appropriate medical follow-up when needed.

What helps

- Listen without dismissing or minimizing the concern.
- Acknowledge the feeling: “I can understand why that frightened you.”
- Encourage a pause, slow breathing, and attention to the present moment.
- Ask what would feel helpful instead of taking over.
- Notice and affirm the person’s abilities, independence, and strengths.
- Support practical tools such as calendars, reminders, routines, and designated places for important items.
- Encourage discussion with a healthcare provider when changes are persistent, worsening, or interfering with daily life.

What to avoid

- Do not quiz, test, or repeatedly challenge the person’s memory.
- Do not say, “You are imagining it,” or “That is ridiculous.”
- Do not turn every ordinary lapse into evidence of dementia.
- Do not repeatedly provide reassurance in a way that keeps the worry cycle going.
- Do not take away choices or independence solely because the person feels anxious.

A helpful response

“I can see that this worries you. Let’s slow down and look at what happened. Was there stress, poor sleep, distraction, illness, or another factor today? If we notice a continuing pattern that affects daily life, we can write it down and talk with your healthcare provider.”

When medical follow-up is appropriate

Encourage professional evaluation when changes are persistent or worsening, involve safety or judgment, cause difficulty with familiar tasks, lead to getting lost in familiar places, or interfere with independent daily functioning.

Seek urgent help for sudden changes

Sudden confusion, new trouble speaking, weakness, severe headache, or an abrupt change in thinking may require urgent medical attention. Call emergency services when symptoms may be an emergency.