

# Alzheimer's San Diego

## Going to the Doctor



**Going to the doctor is extremely important for people with dementia's daily functioning.**

Meeting with medical professionals can be a challenge for people experiencing memory loss. Sometimes just getting them out the front door can be a challenge. But it is important to receive expert medical care for an accurate diagnosis, symptom management, and maintenance of daily functioning. Follow these helpful suggestions to make the trip and experience a little easier.

### Addressing reluctance to see the doctor

People experiencing memory loss may refuse to go to the doctor for many reasons. For some people, anxiety and fear cause a desire to avoid what is seen as a stressful or unpleasant situation. There also may be a long history of cultural factors at play that make some communities more mistrustful of medical professionals. For others, changes in the brain cause the person to lack awareness that anything is wrong with their memory or behavior.

### Communication strategies

**Strategy:** Don't argue; acknowledge their reality. Try framing the request as asking the person to help you to reduce your own worries.

**Example:** *"I know you are healthy, and you feel you don't need to see a doctor, but I would feel so much better knowing that you have a great health record."*

**Strategy:** For those feeling anxious about memory changes, validate their fear and apprehension.

**Example:** *"You seem worried about these changes. We need to ask the doctor if your medications [or blood pressure, hearing difficulties, etc.] could be responsible for your symptoms."*

**Strategy:** Schedule an appointment for both of you and focus on your own health needs.

**Example:** *"I need to see a doctor today. Will you go with me?"*

# Alzheimer's San Diego

## Going to the Doctor

### Getting to the doctor's office

- **Take the emphasis off the doctor:** some people become anxious before an appointment if they are told too far in advance. On the day of, get the person ready to go. If they question where you are going, answer honestly, but try focusing on enjoyable activities planned for afterward.
- **Bring a third person:** take someone along to help drive and occupy the person while you wait.
- **Allow plenty of travel time:** know where you are going, including the building's location, entrance, and floor/suite
- **Call the office ahead of time:** inform the nurse and/or doctor in advance about the person's health, medications or prescription refills, and behaviors. If you will be waiting for a long period, bring distractions along such as snacks, books, or pictures.
- **Schedule a home visit:** Although rare, some doctors make home visits. A nurse practitioner or visiting nurse service may also be able to do an assessment and report to the physician for non-emergency issues.

### General tips for doctor's appointments

- **Decide what questions to prioritize.** Doctors often only have a short amount of time to speak with each of their patients for the day. Make a list and rank concerns by importance. Talk about the most important items first and stay on topic.
- **Keep a log and bring it to the visit.** Write down health changes and be specific about what is happening and how often. Include a list of all medications, including vitamins and over-the-counter drugs. This can also be used to take notes during the appointment.
- **Be honest.** It is natural to feel embarrassed about certain health issues or habits that may be considered unhealthy. Remember that the doctor needs all the facts to suggest the best treatment.
- **Maintain reasonable expectations.** Even the best doctors may not have all the answers, though they might be able to help find the information or provide a referral to a specialist. However, if a doctor regularly brushes off questions, symptoms, or other concerns, consider finding another doctor.