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## Memory problems and denial

It is common for someone living with dementia to deny that they are experiencing issues with their memory or other aspects of cognition.

This could be due to denial or lack of insight. Similar to denial, lack of insight means that a person with dementia is unable to recognise changes in their behaviour and personality. Continued denial can cause problems in the person's future. They may refuse to accept help, there could be delays in starting or stopping medication, or they may continue to drive despite it not being safe for them to do so.

### Offering help to someone with memory problems who may be in denial

Someone living with memory issues may deny that they're experiencing problems. This can be frustrating, especially if you've been encouraging them to visit their GP for a memory test.

### Denial may reflect that the person is feeling fearful and needs time to accept what is happening.

It is possible that they have some awareness of their cognition issues and may be feeling uneasy or anxious about this. They may also be fearful about the future.

They may feel – or think that other people may feel – a stigma about having a diagnosis of dementia.

### Here are some ideas to consider when talking to someone about your worries.

- Broach the topic gently. It may help to remind them that memory issues don't always point towards dementia.
- Be kind and supportive during the conversation. Listen to their reasons and any fears they raise.
- Let them know that you're worried about them. Give examples of issues e.g. missing appointments, misplacing items, forgetting names.
- Break down the larger issue into smaller ones. Pick one to focus on e.g. 'I've noticed you've been forgetting names of friends. Maybe the GP will be able to help.'
- Keep a diary of events as proof. This will help you show someone you're worried about that you have 'evidence' for your worries. The diary will also support you both if you see a doctor as they may want to see a record of issues.
- Turn the focus towards getting support for their friends and family e.g. 'If you visit the GP, we might be able to get extra help that would give me a break...'

If their denial of the issue(s) continues, this may further delay receiving an official diagnosis.

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## **Offering help to someone with dementia who denies their diagnosis**

Receiving a dementia diagnosis can be a daunting experience.

The person who has been diagnosed may feel a range of emotions, from sadness to disbelief to denial.

However the person feels about their diagnosis, when talking to them about how they're feeling, try to stay calm – this may help calm them down, too.

**Denial can be beneficial, as it can give someone time to process news and how they feel about it.**

## **What not to say to somebody with dementia**

A poor choice of language can be both hurtful and frustrating. Here we look at some words and questions to avoid using.

Giving the person time and space to think about their diagnosis and how they feel about it is a good way of approaching the situation.

If they continue to deny their diagnosis, you might start to feel frustrated or unable to help.

**There are a few things you can do to support someone who is in denial about their dementia diagnosis or refusing to accept help.**

- Keep a diary of events – examples of issues, dates, times, locations – and what happened. This record can support you in approaching the person diagnosed with dementia if it feels appropriate, to show them you care and are concerned for them.
- Find out more about local support groups and therapies. Attending these may help the person come to terms with their diagnosis. Talking and art therapies are popular choices.
- Try to stay calm when talking about your concerns. Getting angry or upset can make conversations uncomfortable for everyone involved. The person you're worried about may be more hesitant to talk to you in the future.

It's important to try talking to the person you're worried about, and encourage them to see a doctor themselves.

Where this doesn't work, you might consider speaking to the person's doctor yourself. In doing so, it is best to get the person's consent, or at least inform them that you are going to speak to their doctor. It will then be for the doctor to decide whether they disclose the information to the person.

*Information taken from the Alzheimer's Society website [<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/blog/how-offer-help-someone-dementia-who-doesnt-want-it>]*