

GETTING THE MOST FROM A VISIT TO YOUR DOCTOR

Good communication between the doctor, the person with dementia and their caregiver is very crucial. It is important that the person with dementia and their caregiver form a positive, long-term relationship with their doctor. Overtime, as the needs of the person with dementia and their care provider change, regular visits to the doctor will help in getting the best care possible.

When a visit is short it may be difficult to think of all the things you want to ask or to take in complicated medical information. Here are some ideas that could make your next visit to the doctor easier:

Preparing for your visit:

If you or someone you care for is experiencing problems with memory loss, make an appointment to see the doctor right away.

- Choose a time of day when you will be well rested and at ease for your visit.
- Take along a list of the prescribed and over the counter medications that the person is taking.
- Note any personal and family medical history that may be important.
- Make a list of symptoms, when they began and whether they have changed over time. Note the things that make the symptoms better or worse.
- Ask a family member or friend to go with you for emotional support.
- Decide the three most important questions you want to ask the doctor. Consider asking for a longer appointment if you have many urgent matters to discuss.
- Remember that as a family member or close friend of the person who is experiencing memory loss, you have valuable information to share with the doctor. Your questions and concerns are important.

At the doctor's office:

- Ask your most important questions early in the visit. The doctor will let you know if all of your questions can be answered today or if there is a need for a follow-up visit.
- Give the doctor specific examples of things that concern you. For example: "My spouse (friend) got lost on his/her way home from the store last week."

- Answer the doctor's questions honestly and to the best of your ability.
- Take notes as you talk with the doctor to help you remember what was said. Consider asking the family member or friend who is with you to take notes while you focus on listening and asking questions.
- Ask the doctor to explain tests that are planned and how long it will take to get a diagnosis. If you do not understand medical words or need more information, consider asking for printed material that explains the condition, tests or recommended treatments.
- Ask the doctor to explain all the treatment options available, both those involving medication and those related to providing day to day care.
- Repeat what you think the doctor said in your own words. This lets you check your understanding of the information provided.
- Schedule your next visit before leaving the doctor's office.

When you get home:

- Review the notes from the visit on your own or with the person who recorded them.
- Keep a journal. Write down the things that you are learning, further questions for the doctor and changes you are observing in the person with memory loss. If the person is taking medications, record any reactions. Take this journal when you next visit the doctor.
- Make a note of questions as they arise. Get all the information you need.
- Consider talking to family and friends about health care decisions you are making.
- Request a second opinion if it would make you feel more comfortable.

Feeling overwhelmed?

- Too many questions? Too much information? Confused about treatment? Feeling rushed to make a decision? Anxious and emotional? Let your doctor know what is making you feel uncomfortable. Call the Alzheimer Society Helpline.
- Remember communication is the key to you receiving the health care most suited to the needs of yourself, your family member or your friend.

The Alzheimer Society of Manitoba's mission is to alleviate the individual, family and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders while supporting the search for a cure.

September 2006