Dementia and ageing in one page

What it is

What is dementia?

Dementia is a group of conditions that slowly affect how the brain works: memory, thinking and behaviour. It is not a normal part of getting older. A GP usually starts the assessment and may refer on to a doctor who confirms it.

- Dementia slowly affects memory, thinking and behaviour
- It is not a normal part of getting older
- Some people get dementia before the age of 65

The signs

What are the symptoms of dementia?

Early symptoms include forgetting recent conversations, asking the same questions again, getting confused about time or place, and finding familiar tasks harder. Changes in mood, behaviour and how a person talks are common too. The signs build slowly.

- Forgetting recent conversations is a common early sign
- Familiar tasks can start to feel hard
- Mood, behaviour and speech can change

How a diagnosis happens

How is dementia diagnosed?

In stages, over several visits, not in one test. The GP asks questions, orders blood tests and does a short memory test, then may offer a referral to a memory clinic or specialist. A scan is usually part of it.

Medication

Are dementia medicines on the PBS?

Yes, four are subsidised, for Alzheimer's disease only and one at a time. Your GP or a nurse practitioner can write the script once a specialist has confirmed the diagnosis. The specialist does not always need to see the person.

- The first PBS script phase covers up to 6 months.

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Does a GP or a specialist diagnose dementia?

Your GP or a specialist, often working together. The GP usually starts it and may refer to a geriatrician, a neurologist or a psychiatrist. The geriatrician's long Medicare assessment is only for people 65 and over.

What it costs

What does getting a dementia diagnosis cost?

No one publishes a total. Medicare pays a set benefit at each step: the GP, a geriatrician or other specialist, a psychiatrist. Doctors set their own fees, so what you pay is the fee minus that benefit.

Read next

- What happens at the first GP visit about memory? →
- How do we get into a memory clinic? →
- Who do we call after a diagnosis? →
- The dementia and ageing quiz →

Find these at haihealth.au/blog/dementia

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

Navigation, not diagnosis: this site is general information and is not a substitute for professional advice. Written by Hai from published sources. No clinician has reviewed these pages.

From haihealth.au/blog/dementia, 16 October 2026