

## Tips for visiting your GP

- Make an appointment when your GP is less busy
- Book a longer time for the appointment (some GPs may charge more for a longer appointment)
- Be prepared. Have your questions ready – perhaps make a list. Take along the person's medication list
- Consider taking a relative or friend with you
- Ask for further explanation for anything you don't understand. No question is silly
- Ask for a referral to a specialist who has an interest in the area
- Keep a diary of the person's behaviour and use it to explain the behaviours that concern you
- Be sensitive about discussing your concerns in front of the person with dementia. In the early stages of dementia, a person may deny, or not recognise symptoms
- While you may usually want to include the person in the discussions with your GP, there may be times when you need a separate appointment
- Always book a separate appointment to discuss your own health problems
- Write down or ask your GP to write down what is discussed – especially about medication

These tips have been adapted and reproduced with permission from *The carer experience – an essential guide for carers of people with dementia*, 2002. © Commonwealth of Australia.

## Other resources

**Alzheimer's Australia** for information about dementia, courses, referral service, library, videos, support and advice telephone the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 (freecall) or visit the Alzheimer's Australia's website at: [www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au).

**Carers NSW** provides support and assistance for people who care for relatives or friends. Telephone 1800 242 636 (freecall) or visit their website at: [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au).

### Commonwealth services

**Commonwealth carer resource centres** provide carers with referral to services and practical information to support them in their caring role. Telephone 1800 242 636 (freecall).

**Commonwealth Carelink centres** for information about meal services, personal and nursing care, and home help. Telephone 1800 052 222 (freecall).

**Commonwealth carer respite centres** for respite information. Telephone 1800 059 059 (freecall).

### Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

NSW state government services.  
Telephone 02 8270 2000 or visit [www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au).

### Local councils

Contact your local council to access to local services and information.

### The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

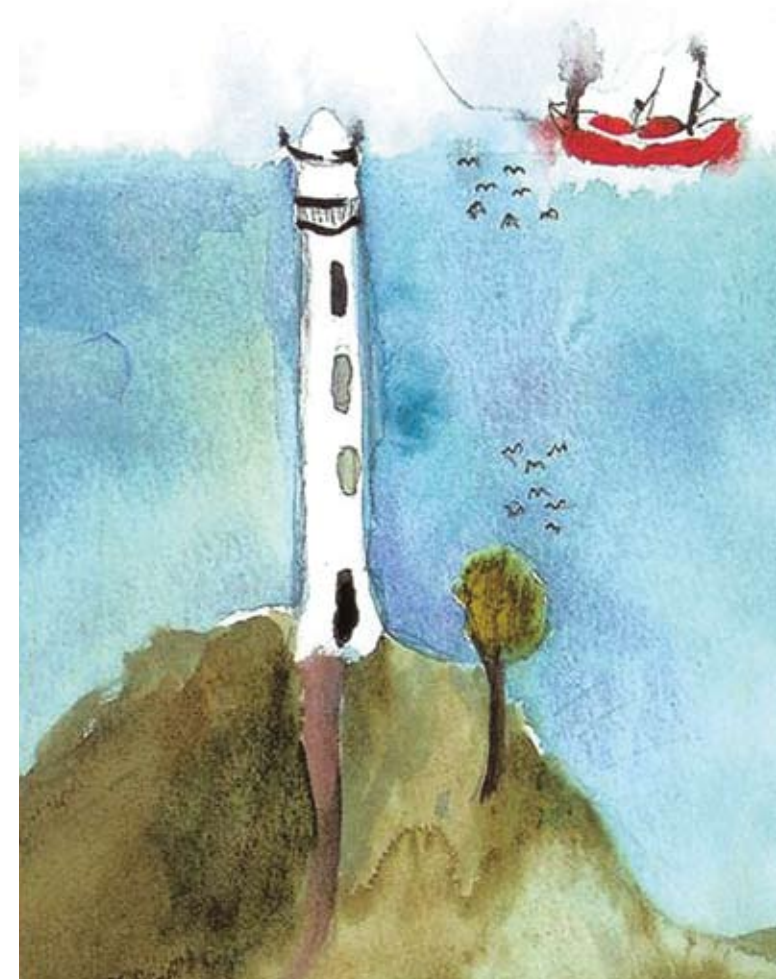
Guidelines for the management of dementia in general practice available from the RACGP's website at: [www.racgp.org.au](http://www.racgp.org.au).

This educational pamphlet was produced by the RACGP NSW Projects, Research and Development Unit with funding from the Bernard Judd Foundation.

Front cover illustration, *Ron's last chance* was painted by Ron Hunt while attending the Sefton Club, a Victorian Uniting Care day centre for people living with dementia. Reproduced with permission.

Published by:  
The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners  
PO Box 145, North Ryde, NSW 1670  
Tel 02 9886 4700, Fax 02 9888 3154, Web [www.racgp.org.au](http://www.racgp.org.au)  
© The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners 2005.  
All rights reserved.

# Do you take care of someone who has dementia?



## Your GP can help



# How GPs can help...

General practitioners provide general medical advice and treatment for medical problems, advice on how to stay healthy, and refer to (and work with) specialists and other services when required. GPs provide advice and support to the person with dementia as well as their carer. Some GPs write a 'care plan' or 'health assessment' for the person who has dementia. These can help carers remember important points and they can be shared with other health professionals.

*A 'carer' is someone (partner, relative, friend) who supports or looks after a person who has dementia.*

## Could it be dementia?

Before making an appointment with your GP, prepare examples of the changes you have noticed in the person, such as memory loss, conversation, organisational skills, or any unusual behaviour. It is recommended to book a longer appointment initially to discuss the issues.

You can talk to your GP alone or together with the person. General practitioners may perform an examination and tests to rule out other medical conditions that might explain what you have noticed. Be persistent – it may take some detective work over a few consultations to get to the bottom of it. Early changes can also be masked to others who are not in regular contact with the person. Find out enough information about dementia to ask questions you need answered by your GP. It may be useful at this early stage to contact Alzheimer's Australia for advice.

Your GP's assessment can be enough to make the diagnosis of dementia but often there is a referral to a specialist for a second opinion. Carer groups may provide information about local specialists or centres with an expertise in dementia.

## Dementia specific advice

As a carer, your GP can help you understand and cope with matters such as challenging behaviour, home safety, and driving issues. Involving other members of the family in these discussions may be useful. In the early stages, your GP can help you consider important legal matters such as power of attorney, guardianship and wills.

When dementia advances, needs change for both the person and carer, and you may need to discuss further home support, residential care, and decision making about the end of the dementia journey. If you are not sure about what to do, ask your GP.

It is reasonable to expect your GP to:

- show interest and listen carefully
- explain what options are available, including clear descriptions of management and medications
- provide the opportunity for you to ask questions
- answer questions in an understandable way
- provide or advise where you can obtain written information
- respect the confidence of you and the person with dementia – medical details are private and permission is required to release details to another person.

## Medication advice

Your GP and specialist(s) can help you understand the drugs available for dementia and those needed for managing other conditions. Your GP can also provide advice on how to simplify administering medications and can coordinate this with your pharmacist.

## Services

Your GP is one part of a 'team' that includes other health professionals and services such as the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT), daycare and respite care, home help, community nursing, meal services, carers' associations, carer resource centres and other health professionals. GPs can refer you to services that can help you with:

- financial assistance for carers, eg. Centrelink (carer payments/carers allowances)
- emotional support systems (eg. Alzheimer's Australia, Carer's association)
- accessing and evaluating residential care options (eg. nursing homes and hostels).

## Carers' needs

Being a carer can be a strain. You are undertaking an important role and you need to consider your own physical and mental health needs. It is important that you remain active and maintain your social contacts.

Your GP is there to care for your physical and emotional wellbeing, and can develop a plan with you to help keep you healthy. Let your GP know you are a carer. If you and the person with dementia have different GPs, the GPs can contact each other if they need to (with your permission).

Some topics you might want to discuss with your GP include:

- general health, medicine and regular check ups
- sleep
- stress, depression and other emotions
- information about financial assistance
- help with household or caring tasks, respite.

Carer support groups provide the opportunity to share the load with others who know what you are going through, and may help you sort through the information you are receiving.