

The Path of Dementia

DIAGNOSIS: Getting an accurate diagnosis as early as possible can rule out causes of memory loss not due to dementia and can help you access care that you need. Having a family member or friend with you for diagnosis is helpful.

CONNECT WITH A DOCTOR OR NURSE YOU TRUST: It will be important for you to be under the care of a doctor or nurse regularly. If you live on-reserve you should be referred to the Home and Community Care Program; off-reserve you should be referred to provincial Home Care services. If you speak an Indigenous language it is extra important to let your doctor or nurse know and to have someone with you who can translate.

TREATMENT: It is important to stay well by being active, getting enough sleep, and eating well. All of these can slow the dementia. Your doctor might also suggest medications to use. There is no cure for dementia but there are medications that have been shown to slow the progression in some people. If you try these medications, it is important to be in regular contact with your doctor about side effects. Some people also use plant-based medicines, ceremony, or spiritual practices to help with the symptoms.

TRANSITIONS: Now you, your caregivers and loved ones will be focussed on your comfort and preparing for your transition out of this life. As you come full circle, it is important that your loved ones understand and are able to carry out your final wishes to help make your transition as gentle as possible.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: This is the time to talk to family, trusted friends or health care providers about how you can be supported. What changes need to be made to your house to help you stay independent? Where do you want to live when you can no longer live on your own? Is there someone you trust as your caregiver? Someone you trust to make financial and medical decisions for you?

EARLY STAGES: You are noticing some memory problems but are still very healthy. It is important to stay physically and socially active. You can still be independent. Many people use humour to talk about changes they are experiencing.

GETTING EXTRA SUPPORT: At this time, you might want to get extra support for everyday routines and needs. Explore community services such as Friendship Centres, Aboriginal Health Centres, Elder's Centres, and Home Care Programs.

MIDDLE STAGES: By now you may notice that the changes to your memory and the difficulties with everyday tasks are making life more challenging. Many people say that there can be days with moments of frustration and anger and other days that are peaceful and joyful. You may need help remembering household routines and names. You may find yourself repeating stories or getting lost in time. Whether you are living on or off-reserve you should now have home care services in place. It is important to have someone with you at appointments to help remember what is said.

TAKING EXTRA CARE: At this time, some people start to forget more important tasks, like turning off the stove, or putting on mittens when it is cold outside. Sometimes you may leave the house and forget to tell someone where you are going. You and your caregivers should talk about making sure that you, your loved ones, and your home are safe and that you have a system in place to keep track of you when you go out. This might include making changes to your home.

LATE STAGES: Some people describe this as going back to childhood or coming full circle. You will need much more help with meals, getting dressed, and getting washed. You will also need to be cared for more closely. Many people experience visions and see and hear things that others around you cannot. Depending on your spiritual beliefs, you may feel closer to the spirit world. You will need more support in everyday routines. You may wish to spend more time with loved ones. You will still have many stories to share and wisdom to pass on. It is important to continue to communicate however you can. Your caregivers and health care providers will help you prepare for your transition to the next stage.