Your doctor will likely take multiple steps in order to evaluate your memory and thinking. The evaluation may be divided into several visits, allowing time to gather information to accurately determine the cause of your concerns and rule out other possibilities. Understanding the type and purpose of the tests your doctor(s) may order and knowing what to expect during an evaluation can be empowering and help to ease anxiety.

**Medical history and physical exam**

To obtain information to assist with diagnosis, your doctor may:

- Ask you about your past and current medical problems and concerns.
- Review all of the medications you currently take, as well as those you took in the past.
- Ask you about your diet and use of alcohol.
- Ask you about medical conditions present in your family.

With your permission, the doctor may also talk to your family members to gain additional insight that can help with reaching a diagnosis.

During a physical exam, your doctor may:

- Check your blood pressure, temperature and pulse.
- Listen to your heart.
- Perform other procedures to assess your overall health.

**Lab tests**

The doctor may order various lab tests to assist in detecting potential causes for your symptoms.

- **Bloodwork.** Your doctor may order bloodwork to check for a thyroid hormone or vitamin deficiency, to rule out infection or to check how organs such as your liver and kidneys are functioning.
- **Urinalysis.** The doctor may request a urine sample to screen for infection and assess kidney function.
- **Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) analysis.** In some cases where additional information is needed, the doctor may order an analysis of proteins in CSF. During this procedure, a sample of CSF is collected via a spinal tap.
Mental health and cognitive status tests

Depression screening. Your doctor may ask you questions to determine if you have symptoms of depression, because depression can cause memory and thinking problems.

Mental cognitive status tests. These tests are used to evaluate your memory, your problem-solving skills and other thinking skills.

- Some tests are very brief. For example, you may be asked about the date and time, asked to remember a short list of words or asked to do simple math calculations. Other tests can involve more time and complex problem solving.
- Some doctors may ask you to participate in a more comprehensive evaluation known as a neuropsychological exam, which uses multiple tests and evaluates many cognitive areas, including executive function, judgment, attention and language.

Brain imaging

Imaging technology is used to evaluate the structure and function of the brain.

- **Computed tomography (CT)** and **magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** scans are used to see the structure of the brain. These scans can show brain shrinkage. They can also rule out conditions that may cause symptoms similar to Alzheimer's disease, but that require different treatment (such as a brain tumor, aneurysm, bleeding in the brain, nerve injury, stroke or the buildup of fluid in the brain). An MRI scan yields higher-resolution images and usually takes a bit longer than a CT scan. Your doctor may order an MRI scan to provide more information about an abnormality seen on a CT scan.

- **Positron emission tomography (PET)** and **single photon emission computed topography (SPECT)** scans are used to evaluate brain function. In both, a radioactive tracer (radiopharmaceutical) is injected into the bloodstream. Analyzing the movement of the tracer helps the doctor to evaluate functions such as blood flow through the brain or the brain's use of glucose.
10 Steps to Approach Memory Concerns
What to do when you notice changes in others

If you notice changes in friends, family or others close to you and are concerned for their health — particularly when it involves changes in memory, thinking or behavior — it can be difficult to know what to do or say. Although it’s natural to be uncertain or nervous about how to offer support, these are significant health concerns. The steps below can help you feel more confident as you assess the situation and take action.

ASSESS THE SITUATION

1. What changes in memory, thinking or behavior do you see?
   What’s the person doing — or not doing — that’s out of the ordinary and causing concern?

2. What else is going on?
   Various conditions can cause changes in memory, thinking and behavior. What health or lifestyle issues could be a factor? E.g., family stress or health issues like diabetes or depression.

3. Learn about the signs of Alzheimer’s and other dementias and the benefits of an early diagnosis.
   Visit alz.org/10signs to educate yourself on the 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s and why it’s important to know if dementia is causing the changes. Do you notice any of the signs in the person you’re concerned about?
4. Has anyone else noticed the change(s)?
Find out if friends and family have seen changes. What are they?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

TAKE ACTION THROUGH CONVERSATION

5. Who should have the conversation to discuss concerns?
It could be you, a trusted family member or friend, or a combination. It’s usually best to speak one-on-one so that the person doesn’t feel threatened by a group, but use your understanding of the person to determine what might work best.

Name(s): ________________________________________________________________

6. What is the best time and place to have the conversation?
Have the conversation as soon as possible. In addition to choosing a date and time, consider where the person will feel most comfortable.

Date: ________________________________
Time of day: _________________________
Location: ___________________________

7. What will you or the person having the conversation say?
Try the following:
» I’ve noticed [change] in you, and I’m concerned. Have you noticed it? Are you worried?
» How have you been feeling lately? You haven’t seemed like yourself.
» I noticed you [specific example] and it worried me. Has anything else like that happened?

Write additional conversation starters below.
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
8. **Offer to go with the person to the doctor.**
   Ask the person if he or she will see a doctor and show your support by offering to go to the appointment. Some words of encouragement may include:
   - There are lots of things that could be causing this, and dementia may or may not be one of them. Let's see if the doctor can help us figure out what's going on.
   - The sooner we know what's causing these problems, the sooner we can address it.
   - I think it would give us both peace of mind if we talked with a doctor.
   Write your own ideas below:

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

9. **If needed, have multiple conversations.**
   The first conversation may not be successful. Write down some notes about the experience to help plan for the next conversation.
   - Location took place: _______________________________________
   - Date/time of day: _______________________________________
   - What worked well? _______________________________________
   - What didn't? _______________________________________
   - What was the result? _______________________________________
   - What can be done differently next time? ____________________

**REACH OUT FOR HELP**

10. **Turn to the Alzheimer’s Association for information and support.**
   - Visit [alz.org/education](http://alz.org/education) to take our free [Dementia Conversations](http://alz.org/education) online program. Learn how to have honest and caring conversations about common concerns — including driving, doctor visits, and legal and financial planning — when someone begins to show signs of dementia.
   - Call our 24/7 Helpline (800.272.3900) to speak with a master’s-level clinician who can provide more information about how to discuss memory concerns with someone close to you.
   - Visit [Community Resource Finder](http://alz.org/CRF) (alz.org/CRF) to find local resources, such as a health care professional and your closest Association chapter.
   - Explore [Evaluating Memory and Thinking Problems: What to Expect](http://alz.org/evaluatememory) (alz.org/evaluatememory) to learn what a typical medical evaluation may include.