

# Healthwise

A PERS Health Insurance Program newsletter



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## Dementia myths and facts you should know

Dementia is not just an illness; it is a group of symptoms that affect the brain's ability to work as it should. The disease and its causes are not fully understood, which has led to the creation of several myths about dementia. This article will help you sort through the myths and facts about dementia.

### **Myth #1: Alzheimer's disease and dementia are the same thing.**

**Fact:** Dementia is an umbrella term; Alzheimer's disease is a type of dementia falling under that umbrella. In fact, Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, but there are other types as well. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Huntington's disease, Lewy body disease and Parkinson's disease also are associated with dementia.

### **Myth #2: There is nothing you can do about dementia once you have it.**

**Fact:** Dementia is a progressive disease, which means it gets worse over time. However, you may be able to slow the advance of dementia and learn to cope with your loss of certain abilities. Work with your healthcare provider on these things and try to stay as physically, mentally and socially active as you can.

### **Myth #3: Dementia is just part of aging.**

**Fact:** Dementia is a medical condition. It is not an automatic part of the aging process. In fact, some types of dementia occur in relatively young people. Certain factors may put you at risk for dementia, such as age, family history, diabetes, smoking and others. Talk to your healthcare provider about your personal risk and steps you can take to reduce that risk.

### **Myth #4: If someone in your family has dementia or Alzheimer's disease, you will have it too.**

**Fact:** Some forms of dementia may be genetic. You have some control over how your genetic risk affects you. Maintain a healthy lifestyle to reduce your risk of dementia.

### **Myth #5: Your memory is not very sharp, so you must have dementia.**

**Fact:** Some memory loss is normal with aging and doesn't mean you have dementia. People who suffer from dementia have a decline in at least two brain functions, such as memory loss and language.

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Changes in personality and social behavior, feelings of confusion, and the inability to remember people and names also can be signs of dementia. If you or a loved one has signs of dementia, talk to your healthcare provider right away.

Your healthcare provider can use a number of methods to find out if you are suffering from dementia. Your provider will ask you questions about your medical history and give you a physical exam. He or she also will evaluate your mental status to find out more about what brain functions are not at their best. After these tests, your healthcare provider may order blood tests or brain scans, such as a CT scan or MRI. Blood tests and brain scans are done because a number of other conditions can have the same symptoms as dementia. These tests can rule out other disorders and help your healthcare provider decide if you have dementia. It also may help him or her discover what is causing the dementia.

Caring for someone with dementia can be challenging. Dementia also can cause mood swings and personality changes. The way you talk to your loved one is the most important thing to remember in caring for her or him.

State your message clearly in a simple way. Listen with your ears and your eyes. Sometimes dementia patients struggle with words, so watch for body cues. If your loved one becomes upset, change the subject or environment. Remember the good old days with your loved one. Dementia often affects short-term memory, while older memories are remembered. You will both enjoy talking about your fond memories.

Coping as a caregiver can be taxing. Remember that it is okay to ask for help. A number of support groups and resources are available for caregivers.

For more information about dementia and caregiver resources, visit:

[www.helpguide.org/elder/alzheimers\\_disease\\_dementia\\_support\\_caregiver.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/elder/alzheimers_disease_dementia_support_caregiver.htm)

[www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caregiver-guide-tips-caregivers-people-alzheimers-disease](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caregiver-guide-tips-caregivers-people-alzheimers-disease)

[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

[www.OHSU.edu/research/alzheimers](http://www.OHSU.edu/research/alzheimers)

*Article courtesy of ODS*

For a complete list of brand and generic medications covered under your current ODS, Providence or PacificSource PERS prescription drug benefit, please visit ODS online at [www.odscompanies.com/members](http://www.odscompanies.com/members) or log on to your myODS account and consult the PERS Prescription Drug Plan List of Covered Drugs. You also can contact ODS Pharmacy Customer Service for additional information at 503-265-4709 or 888-786-7509.

# What is your doctor thinking?

In 2009, 49,007 Consumer Reports subscribers were asked about their experiences in their providers' offices. In September 2010, 660 physicians answered questions about their professional challenges and how patients could get more out of their relationships with care providers. When viewed together, these surveys highlight the misconceptions present in some doctor-patient relationships, but also provide a road map for fostering more beneficial care overall.

## Develop a long-term relationship

Having continuity of care with the same provider goes a long way toward better health and longevity. Of the doctors surveyed, 76 percent believed that working with the same provider over time could help “very much” in receiving better medical care. When providers have personal experience with your health history, they are better able to make suggestions along the way and are more likely to tune into changes in your health status as they occur.

## Generate mutual respect

Having respect for your doctor also helps in getting better care. In fact, 61 percent of doctors said it would help “very much.” However, 70 percent said that since they began practicing medicine, respect and appreciation from patients had declined. But patients require respect from their providers, too. Patients who feel that their doctors conduct themselves professionally ultimately feel more satisfied overall. “Professional” behavior includes treating patients with respect, having a certain level of technical competence, taking time to look at a patient’s medical history, listening with patience, and spending adequate time with them.

## Follow doctor’s orders

The top complaint that providers had about their patients was noncompliance with instructions. Most agreed that this interferes with their ability to provide the best care. But following your doctor’s orders can be complicated and sometimes expensive. It’s important to ask questions and work with your doctor while

you are in the office to develop a plan that meets your health needs as well as your lifestyle. If something isn’t working after you are at home or you develop side effects, it’s critical to contact your provider to come up with an alternate plan.

## Pain is a problem

Only 37 percent of doctors felt they were “very effective” in treating pain. However, 79 percent of patients felt that their providers helped reduce their pain or discomfort.

This discrepancy most likely occurred because the doctors surveyed were considering all of their patients and each individual person surveyed was thinking of his or her own health. Patients with chronic conditions, such as immune disorders, headaches, back pain, anxiety and depression are very difficult to treat. People with chronic conditions were less satisfied with their doctor’s ability to relieve pain overall. However, patients with chronic conditions who also had a trusting, respectful relationship with their providers were more likely to feel satisfied with their pain care.

*“...80 percent of doctors surveyed think it’s helpful to bring someone with you to office visits.”*

### **Keep track of your details**

While most providers’ offices keep electronic records nowadays, 89 percent of doctors said that it’s helpful for you to keep track of your own health history. However, only 33 percent of patients actually keep their own records up to date at home. In addition, 80 percent of doctors surveyed think it’s helpful to bring someone with you to office visits. When you’re feeling sick or anxious about a doctor’s visit, it can be difficult to remember everything your provider says. However, only 28 percent of patients surveyed said they typically bring someone with them.

### **Research online with care**

The Internet has become an everyday tool — 61 percent of patients surveyed said they do online health research. However, only 8 percent of providers surveyed feel that online research is helpful. The problem is that many individuals go online and post

inaccurate or very personal information that may not apply to everyone. Some websites are product-driven and make suggestions based on their own interests. It’s not that you shouldn’t do online health research, but you should be selective in the sites you choose to review. Here are a few recommended sites, offering objective and well-researched information:

- Consumer Reports Health, [www.consumerreportshealth.org](http://www.consumerreportshealth.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Food and Drug Administration, [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)
- MedlinePlus, [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)
- National Cancer Institute, [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)
- Mayo Clinic, [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)
- Cleveland Clinic, [www.clevelandclinic.org](http://www.clevelandclinic.org)

### **Respect your doctor’s time**

The No. 1 thing providers said interfered with their ability to give the best care was the enormous amount of insurance paperwork they are required to take care of. No. 2 on the list is the financial pressure to work at least 50 hours a week and see up to 100 patients during that time. Patients can make optimal use of their doctors’ time by coming prepared with a list of questions and concerns in order of priority. If you don’t have time to address everything you’d like, ask your doctor if you can email him or her directly after your visit with the rest of your concerns.

### **Ask about your provider’s relationship with drug companies**

Most doctors surveyed admitted that they were contacted by drug salespeople up to 10 times a month — and some even more often. More than 25 percent of patients surveyed felt concerned that their providers are too quick to prescribe drugs. Don’t hesitate to ask your doctor about his or her relationship with drug companies and how that might affect your treatment plan.

*Article courtesy of PERS*

# Using spirometry for COPD diagnosis

Primary care providers (PCPs) usually need to see patients in the early stages of any chronic lung condition. Before setting the patient up on a treatment plan, the provider will need to know if the symptoms stem from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or a different lung condition, such as asthma.

To confirm whether or not it is COPD, the PCP will ask for certain tests to be performed. A test called “spirometry” measures how much air you can breathe out and how long it takes you to do so. This test lets your healthcare provider see how well your lungs are working and shows if you have any specific problems.

A spirometry test may confirm a diagnosis of COPD and show if it is mild, moderate, severe or very severe. A spirometry test helps your provider decide what medicines may help you. It also will help your provider create a treatment plan to best help you manage your COPD at home. When your provider repeats a spirometry test, he or she is looking to see how well your medicine and treatment plan are working.

After the spirometry test is done, it is important for you and your provider to go over the results. You may hear terms that can be confusing, such as FVC, FEV1 and FEV1/FVC ratio. With normal lung function, the result of the ratio is between 70 percent and 80 percent. An outcome of less than 70 percent means airflow is limited, and the patient may have COPD.

Once you talk about the results of the spirometry, the next step is to discuss how you will treat it. Your provider will follow certain guidelines to choose a treatment plan that is right for you. Talk to your provider about any medicines that he or she prescribes. Understand how to take them, how often to take them, when to take them and what signs to watch for. Your provider will want to know if you are taking the medicine as prescribed and how you are feeling. It is a good idea to keep track of your symptoms in a journal to take with you the next time you see your provider. It is important to talk about what to do if your symptoms get worse or if you feel you are catching a cold. If your symptoms continue to increase, your provider may want to repeat the spirometry test.

To help you understand your condition, ask your provider questions such as:

- Will my activity be limited?
- Is diet important?
- Should I do special exercises?
- Will COPD become worse for me?
- Will weather affect my symptoms?
- Is surgery an option for me?
- Should I see a lung specialist?

Having a chronic condition may seem scary at times, but the more information and tools you have to help you manage the condition, the more control you have over your own well-being.

## References:

*American Thoracic Society and European Respiratory Society. Standards for the diagnosis and Management of Patients with COPD. (Updated 2011).*

*Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease. Global Strategy for the Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. (Updated 2010).*

*Article courtesy of PacificSource*



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# Numbers

## **PERS**

[www.pershealth.com](http://www.pershealth.com)  
P.O. Box 40187  
Portland, OR 97240-0187  
503-224-7377  
800-768-7377

### *PERS Pension Office*

[www.oregon.gov/pers](http://www.oregon.gov/pers)

### *Mailing Address*

P.O. Box 23700  
Tigard, OR 97281-3700

### *Street Address*

11410 S.W. 68th Parkway  
Tigard, OR 97223-8634  
503-598-7377  
888-320-7377

## **Kaiser Permanente**

[www.kaiserpermanente.org](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org)  
500 N.E. Multnomah, Ste. 100  
Portland, OR 97232-2099  
503-813-2000  
800-813-2000

## **Providence Health Plan**

[www.providencehealthplan.com](http://www.providencehealthplan.com)  
3601 S.W. Murray Blvd. #10  
Beaverton, OR 97005  
503-574-8000  
800-603-2340

### *Mailing Address*

P.O. Box 4327  
Portland, OR 97208-4327

### *Claims*

P.O. Box 3125  
Portland, OR 97208-3125  
Providence RN  
503-574-6520  
800-700-0481

## **PacificSource Health Plans**

[www.pacificsource.com](http://www.pacificsource.com)  
2965 N.E. Conners Ave.  
Bend, OR 97701

### *Claims*

P.O. Box 7469  
Bend, OR 97701

## **ODS**

[www.odskompanies.com](http://www.odskompanies.com)  
601 S.W. Second Ave.  
Portland, OR 97204-3156

### *Medical*

503-243-3880  
800-962-1533 (Oregon)  
800-852-5195 (National)

### *Dental*

503-243-4494  
800-452-1058 (Oregon)  
800-852-5195 (National)

### *Pharmacy*

503-265-4709  
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