

A simple, step-by-step guide to help you feel calm, organised, and ready — for both of you.

1. Clarify the Purpose of the Appointment

Before anything else, get clear on why this appointment is happening. It will shape how you prepare your relative, what you bring, and what you ask.

1. Check the appointment letter, text, or booking confirmation for the reason given.
2. If unsure, call the surgery or clinic and ask directly: is this a check-up, a review, a new symptom, a scan, or test results?
3. Write the purpose down in one simple sentence, e.g. "Memory clinic review" or "Blood test follow-up." You'll use this to explain it simply to your relative and to keep the conversation on track once you're there.
4. Note whether this appointment may lead to a diagnosis, a change in medication, or further tests — this helps you mentally prepare for different outcomes.

2. Prepare Your Relative Beforehand

For someone with dementia, unfamiliar places and uncertainty can bring anxiety. A calm, simple approach — timed well — makes a big difference.

1. Choose your timing carefully. For most people with dementia, mentioning it a day before (or the morning of) works better than weeks in advance, which can cause repeated worry or be forgotten and feel like a surprise.
2. Use short, simple, reassuring language. For example: "We're going to see the doctor tomorrow morning, just a check-up. I'll be with you the whole time."
3. Avoid words that may cause alarm, such as "test" or "hospital," if these have upset your relative before. Use softer, familiar terms instead, like "appointment" or "seeing the doctor."
4. Keep the morning routine as normal as possible — same breakfast, same order of getting ready — so the day still feels familiar.
5. Offer small choices to give a sense of control, e.g. "Would you like to wear the blue cardigan or the grey one?"
6. If your relative gets anxious easily, avoid dwelling on the appointment repeatedly. Mention it, then move on to something normal and calming.
7. Reassure them about what happens afterwards — e.g. "We'll come straight home after" or "We'll stop for a cup of tea on the way back" — so there's something familiar to look forward to.

3. What to Do Before You Go

1. Confirm the date, time, location, and department, and check for any specific instructions (e.g. fasting, arrive 15 minutes early).
2. Check parking, drop-off points, or accessible entrances in advance, especially for hospitals — this saves stress on the day.
3. Call ahead if your relative will need extra support, such as a wheelchair, a quieter waiting area, or help with mobility, so staff can prepare.
4. Pack your bag the night before (see the checklist below) so the morning is unhurried.
5. Plan for extra time — build in a buffer for slower walking, toilet stops, or a moment to pause if your relative becomes anxious.
6. Make sure your relative has eaten and had something to drink beforehand, unless instructed otherwise.
7. Bring a small comfort item if it helps — a familiar object, a photo, or something to hold.
8. Arrange transport in advance and know your route, including a backup plan if traffic or delays happen.

4. What to Bring

Use this checklist to pack the night before, so nothing is forgotten in the morning rush.

- ☐ Appointment letter or confirmation (with reference number if there is one)
- ☐ NHS number and photo ID
- ☐ Current list of medications, doses, and times (or the medications themselves, if asked to bring them)
- ☐ GP contact details
- ☐ Lasting Power of Attorney (health and welfare, or property and finance) or similar legal authority documents, if relevant
- ☐ A "This is Me" document or care plan, if you have one, summarising your relative's needs, routines, and how best to communicate with them
- ☐ Glasses, hearing aids (with spare batteries), and any mobility aids
- ☐ A written list of your questions and concerns (see below)
- ☐ Notebook and pen to write down what's said — it's easy to forget details afterwards
- ☐ Water and a light snack
- ☐ A comfort item or familiar object
- ☐ Phone, charged, with the clinic's number saved
- ☐ Any previous test results, scans, or letters relevant to this visit
- ☐ Something to occupy a wait — e.g. a magazine, or simply your calm presence

5. Questions to Ask

It's easy to forget questions once you're in the room. Bring this list and tick off what's answered.

About today's visit

- What is the purpose of today's visit, and what are you hoping to find out or achieve?
- What will happen during the appointment, and roughly how long will it take?
- How might this affect their day-to-day life, memory, or behaviour?

About treatment or care

- What are the options, and what do you recommend for someone with dementia specifically?
- Are there any risks or side effects that could affect memory, confusion, or mood?
- If medication is involved, how will it interact with what they're already taking?
- How will we know if this is working, or whether it's helped?

About next steps

- What happens next, and when?
- Do we need to book a follow-up appointment, test, or procedure, and if so, when and with whom?
- Who do we contact if things change or get worse before then?
- Is there anything we should watch for at home?

About support and care

- Are there any services, support groups, or professionals (e.g. Admiral Nurses, social worker, occupational therapist) that could help us now?
- Is there anything I can do to make future appointments or visits easier for my relative?
- Can this information be shared with our GP or another family member involved in their care?

A gentle reminder

- You know your relative best — trust your instincts about pacing, timing, and what feels right on the day.
- It's okay to ask staff to slow down, repeat something, or speak directly to your relative rather than only to you.
- Be kind to yourself too. Supporting someone through appointments like this takes real care and patience.

You're doing a wonderful job. Being prepared is one of the kindest things you can do — for your relative, and for yourself.

Need a little more support?

Book a free Discovery Call with Pathways Dementia Support and let's talk through what would help you and your family most.



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