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Action Plan: You've Just Been Diagnosed With Early Stage Alzheimer's Disease

Finding out you have Alzheimer's disease can be devastating. How can you best prepare for the years ahead?

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Your doctor said that all signs point to your being in the early stages of [Alzheimer's disease](#). After you absorb the devastating news, what's next?

The best strategy is to create a long-term action plan that covers medical, legal, financial, personal and [caregiving](#) matters. This will give you a say

in important decisions that affect your future.

1. Coping with the diagnosis

Right now, you need personal support and information to plan ahead.

- Inform family and close friends. Think about moving closer to loved ones for support.
- Read up on the disease. Learn about the stages and treatment options.
- Contact your local Alzheimer's Association for resources.

Look into other services in your community for people with the disease, such as home-delivered meals and [adult day care](#) programs.

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- Get advice on practical tips for people with Alzheimer's. This includes simple things like direct deposit of checks or putting labels on drawers.
- Talk to a clergy member or mental health counselor if you are upset or worried. Hospitals often offer [support groups](#) for people with Alzheimer's and their families, too.

2. Get the best medical care

There is no cure for Alzheimer's. But early treatment can often delay progression of the disease and improve quality of life.

- Find a doctor who knows about Alzheimer's and with whom you are comfortable. This could be your current doctor, a [geriatrician](#), [neurologist](#) or a geriatric psychiatrist.
- Medication can often slow the course of Alzheimer's if it's started early on. Ask your doctor if this is an option for you, or if there is a clinical trial of a promising therapy that might help you.
- Ask your doctor how to care for yourself. Exercise, a healthy diet and mental activity may be very helpful.
- Tell your doctor if you feel depressed or [anxious](#) or have sleep problems. You might benefit from a treatment for it.
- See your doctor regularly and report any changes in your symptoms.

3. Caring for yourself

Due to the nature of the disease, you may not recognize how severe your condition is getting. So, it's important to listen to your doctor, family and friends when they say you need help.

- Consider safety issues. Do you need reminders to lock the door, turn off the stove or take medicine?
- Have your doctor and others close to you monitor your ability to drive.
- Ask family or friends to assist you with any tasks you can't manage. Or hire outside help.
- Arrange for someone to look in on you or call regularly if you live alone.

4. Plans for long-term care

Make arrangements in case the time comes when you can no longer care for yourself. You might talk to a geriatric care manager who can describe options and coordinate details.

- Take stock of your finances. Talk to a [social worker](#) or financial manager about what long-term care you can afford.
- If you don't plan to move for a while, get specific commitments from friends and relatives as to how they will help. Or look into hiring a live-in companion or home care professional.
- Tour assisted living and nursing care facilities. Look for one with a special Alzheimer's unit.
- Provide a list of instructions and contact information so family and friends can honor your wishes.

5. Financial and legal matters

An [advance directive](#) lets people know how you would like your affairs handled if you become unable to speak or decide for yourself.

- Pull together your important papers and financial assets, such as bank accounts, mortgage, insurance policies and pension plans.
- Find an elder law attorney or other legal counsel to help you create a will. You will also need a:
 - power of attorney for health care to make medical decisions on your behalf
 - living will that instructs doctors on what medical procedures you do or don't want to delay death
 - power of attorney for your finances
- Get signed documents to the right people - doctors, relatives, designees.

The course of Alzheimer's is often slow, but every case is different. Creating an action plan now will let you continue to have a say in matters that are important to you.

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