

Talking with Your Employer About a Dementia Diagnosis

Why This Matters

Deciding whether, when, and how to talk with your employer about a dementia diagnosis is a highly individualized decision that is also heavily influenced by the nature of the work you are performing. In general, there are two reasons why you would want to disclose your diagnosis to your employer. The most common scenario relates to the need to request accommodations in the workplace. The second reason relates to occupations that have safety-sensitive tasks. If your work could affect your safety or the safety of others, it may be important to tell your employer about your diagnosis, even if you do not need accommodations at this time.

In many cases, you do not need to share your diagnosis right away, but waiting too long could affect your rights in the workplace. If you need accommodations to do your job, starting the conversation before problems arise can help you and your employer find a good path forward.

This guide can help you prepare for that conversation, whatever you decide.

What You Need to Know

Before the Conversation

- Review your job description and employment contract, if applicable.
- Review your employee handbook for accommodation procedures, medical leave, and Human Resources contacts.
- Think through your goals — what do you hope this conversation accomplishes?
- Write down your questions in advance.
- Gather documentation from your health care provider, if appropriate.
- Decide who you want to talk to first — a supervisor, Human Resources, or both.

During the Conversation

- Focus on how your condition affects your work, rather than sharing your entire medical history.
- Be honest, thoughtful, and prepared.
- Approach the discussion collaboratively — the ADA describes this as an "interactive process" between you and your employer.
- Take notes or ask if you can follow up in writing.
- Ask for the next steps and expected timelines.

After the Conversation

- Document what was discussed and any agreed-upon accommodations.
- Follow up in writing if that wasn't already part of the conversation.
- Check in periodically — accommodations can be adjusted as your needs change.

Take Action

What do I want my employer to understand?

Questions to Ask

- What is the process for requesting a workplace accommodation?
- Will I need documentation from my health care provider?
- How will my information be kept confidential?
- Who else will need to know?
- What happens next, and how long does the process usually take?

Helpful Tips

- Remember: there are no magic words. You don't need to say "reasonable accommodation" for the conversation to count — you simply need to explain that you're experiencing challenges and may need support.
- Bring a trusted friend or family member if that helps you feel supported.
- Ask for information in writing whenever possible.
- Keep copies of all paperwork and notes.
- Asking for support is not a sign of failure — it is often the first step toward continuing to work successfully.

Helpful Resources

- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
- Your employer's Human Resources department
- An employment attorney, if your situation is complex or you believe your rights were violated

Things to Consider

- Every situation is different.
- You may want to talk this through with your family, care partner, or trusted advisor before your conversation.
- There may be legal or employment implications worth discussing with a qualified professional.

Quick Reference

- Prepare: review policies, write questions, and gather documentation.
- Communicate: be clear, honest, and collaborative.
- Document: keep notes and follow up in writing.
- Remember: you don't have to navigate this alone.