

Understanding Your Rights at Work: At a Glance

Why This Matters

This one-page reference summarizes the key laws and protections discussed in this chapter, so you can revisit them quickly whenever you need to.

What You Need to Know

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- Applies to employers with 15 or more employees.
- Prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities.
- A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (such as thinking, concentrating, communicating, or working).
- Dementia may meet this definition, depending on how it affects you.
- Requires many employers to provide reasonable accommodations, unless doing so would cause an undue hardship.
- Prohibits retaliation against employees who exercise their rights under the law.

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)

- Protects workers 40 years of age or older.
- Generally applies to employers with 20 or more employees.
- Prohibits discrimination in hiring, firing, promotion, layoffs, and benefits.

Reasonable Accommodations

- Changes to the work environment or how a job is performed.
- Meant to provide equal access and opportunity — not special treatment.
- Examples: flexible scheduling, written instructions, checklists, a quieter workspace, assistive technology.
- Most accommodations are simple and low-cost.
- Requests may be denied if they pose an undue hardship on the employer.

What Your Employer Can Ask

- Medical documentation related to your accommodation request.
 - In some cases, an independent medical evaluation.
 - Employers should focus on your ability to perform essential job functions — not unnecessary medical detail.
- **Medical information should be kept confidential and shared only with those who need to know.**

If the ADA Doesn't Apply to Your Employer

- Many states have their own disability discrimination laws that may apply to smaller employers.
- Example: Michigan's Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act.

- Ask your state labor agency or an employment attorney about protections where you live.

A Key Lesson: Communicate Early

- You do not need to use the words "reasonable accommodation" for a request to count.
- Courts have found that employees generally need to communicate the need for support before an employer must begin the interactive process.
- If dementia is affecting your work, don't wait until problems become serious — start the conversation early.

Take Action

- Review your employee handbook for your employer's specific policies.
- Complete the Dementia Symptoms Checklist and Workplace Accommodation Planning Worksheet.
- Prepare for a conversation using the Talking with Your Employer guide.
- Contact the EEOC or an employment attorney if you have questions about your rights.

Helpful Resources

- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) — eeoc.gov
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) — askjan.org
- Your state labor or civil rights agency
- An employment attorney experienced in disability rights

Quick Reference: Remember

- A dementia diagnosis does not automatically end your career or your workplace rights.
- You may be protected under the ADA, the ADEA, and state law.
- Reasonable accommodations exist to help you keep working successfully.
- Communicating your needs early is one of the most effective things you can do.
- You are not alone — support and guidance are available.