

Employment

Do I tell my employer of my dementia diagnosis?

This is a complex question with no easy answer.

Dementia may cause various impairments in functioning which may affect your ability to do your job or it may have no affect initially. It is important to consider all the options before making a decision about informing your employer and on-going employment.

Tips

- Allow time to absorb the diagnosis and don't rush into a decision.
- Fully review all aspects of your situation before telling your employer.
- Talk to family, health professionals and where appropriate, union representative, about your particular working conditions and health issues.
- Do not resign from employment without proper consultation and advice about employee entitlements and rights.

Assess your work situation

- How many years have you been in your present employment?
- What is the nature of your work (occupation)?
- Are you employed in a small, medium or large company?
- Does your diagnosis pose safety risks for your or others in the workplace?
- What is your relationship with management?
- How is your work performance?

- How do you feel your employer will respond to the news of your diagnosis?
- What superannuation, death and disability insurance do you have?
- Would it help to have an advocate with you if and when you do inform your employer?

Once you have informed your employer

- Regularly monitor how your employment situation is progressing.
- If there are any issues with work performance then get advice as to how to handle the negotiation process.

Attention problems that particularly impact on work

- Develop a routine structure for each work day. For example, have a set time each day for return phone calls; a set time for specific projects; and a set time for administrative tasks. This will ensure that these activities do not interfere with each other but also ensures that they don't get put off, adding to organisational difficulties and stress.
- Factor in break time at regular intervals through the day to enable minimisation of fatigue and revitalisation of attention.
- If a task seems too difficult, or attention is declining – do not push it, as this will only make it worse. Take a break immediately then come back to the task with a clearer mind.
- A diary should be used at all times.

What is younger onset dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe problems with progressive changes in memory and thinking. Dementia can happen to anyone, and although it is far more common over the age of 65, it can affect younger adults. Younger onset dementia comes in many forms, with the most common types being Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and dementia with Lewy bodies. There are also many rare forms of dementia that may occur in adults. Dementia is not a normal part of ageing.

Employment continued

- In meetings, and work conversations – notes should be taken to maintain focus.
- When working through a problem, you should also write notes, or develop a flow-chart or problem-solving plan.
- Always minimise distractions, such as noise, email, phone calls (divert calls to message bank) and visual stimuli, when focus on important activities is required.
- Deal with one task or problem at a time and complete it before moving onto the next.
- Set goals to work towards to achieve a focus. Set yourself a reward for attaining the goals to provide some motivation.

Leaving the workforce before diagnosis

In some cases you may have left employment before a diagnosis of dementia was confirmed.

- Check the superannuation policy (employer related and private) to see if it includes death and disability cover.
- If there is disability cover, check whether or not a claim has been made.
- It may be possible to make a claim retrospectively for the disability benefit.
- A disability claim may be appropriate if memory loss or other cognitive changes occurred before leaving employment and was a factor in leaving work.
- Check if there are any written notes in your employment history or medical history about any impact of these changes.
- Tests and records prior to diagnosis may provide evidence that the illness was the cause of leaving work.

Leaving the workforce after diagnosis

Leaving the workforce should only occur after appropriate consultation has taken place with the immediate family, advocates and the employer.

- Seek a medical and neuropsychological assessment to confirm the progression of your dementia and its impact on work capacity.
- As this workforce departure is health related, an employee is entitled, on the production of a medical certificate, to utilise unused sick leave.
- Check that annual leave and long service leave is paid out at the correct amount.
- If there is a disability component attached to your superannuation arrangements, do not resign from your employment. Most policies have a 3-6 month waiting time before an application can be made for a disability entitlement and it may be necessary to take paid or unpaid leave in the interim. Resignation can occur after the acceptance of your disability application.
- If conflict arises during the termination process, use support networks such as family, unions, or other sources of legal support.

