

Decision making capacity - who decides?

Dementia may lead to inappropriate decision making (such as making poor financial or medical decisions), or dementia may lead to a person being vulnerable to inappropriate influence by others.

Decision making capacity may need to be determined when an immediate specific decision that needs to be made about yourself on issues such as accommodation, finances, medical treatment or legal processes.

In many cases your decision making capacity ought not to be questioned unless there is a significant risk of harm to yourself or others as a result of a poorly judged decision.

Impaired decision making should not be confused with poor judgement. People with intact cognitive abilities also make errors of judgement and do things that someone else would not.

The issue is not whether you are making a good decision, but whether you are making an informed decision. Are you using all available information when making a decision or only a limited range of immediate facts? Do you understand when someone points out the consequences of your decision?

Minimising risk may first require less restrictive options to be investigated to maintain your independence, self-esteem and familiar routine for as long as possible.

If necessary an assessment may be required to determine your ability to make informed decisions.

Tips

Consider obtaining a 'competency assessment'

For peace of mind, it might be appropriate to consider obtaining a 'competency assessment' from a qualified professional. The report can then be used in a range of situations to demonstrate the extent to which you have the capacity to make your own decisions.

An assessment will usually be undertaken by a neuropsychologist.

The assessment seeks to measure the extent to which you are able to

- Understand information
- Make informed judgements
- Reason through complex problems
- Remember important information essential to the processes at hand

A responsible authority, if required to decide on your decision making capacity, will usually consider your wishes if they have been made clear in a document. Such authorities may also consider the views of significant other people in your life if you have informed them of your wishes.

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.

