The holiday check in

How to have conversations about care

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The next right step: Supporting Mum or Dad to see the GP.

Created by Clinical Psychologist Melissa Levi in partnership with Mable

You've noticed changes in Mum or Dad at Christmas, and have shared your concerns with them. Now, you might be feeling anxious about what comes next.

- How do I make sure that Mum actually sees her GP?
- What's the GP going to say?
- Is this doctor's visit going to open a door that I'm not ready to walk through?

Having walked this journey with more than 1,000 families just like yours (as well as with my own), I know this to be true: Whatever happens, seeing the GP now is one of the best investments you can make in your parents' health and your family's future.

The earlier you act, the more options you have for treatment, support, and planning. You'll gain time, choice, and peace of mind. And, most importantly, you'll help Mum or Dad stay as healthy and independent as possible, for as long as possible.

GP appointment guide

How to encourage Mum or Dad to see their doctor

You don't need to memorise these scripts or use them word for word. Simply read through, take what fits, and trust that you know your mum or dad best.

If they're open but nervous:

> "Mum, the doctor might help us understand and make sense of what's been going on, even if it's something simple, like medication or vitamin levels. I'd love to come with you, just to make sure we cover everything."

If they say "There's nothing wrong with me":

> "I really hope you're right. Seeing the GP will help us both stop worrying (you know me, I'm a worrywart) and make sure everything's okay. And, you're probably right. But, even so, it's always good to have a clear baseline of your health. That way, if anything ever changes down the track, we'll know what's normal for you."

If they say “Doctors can’t help” or “I don’t want bad news”:

> “Dad, I get it. It can be scary not knowing. It’s worth having a conversation with your GP before assuming it is bad news and that there is nothing you can do about it. You know, there’s been so much progress in medical treatments lately.”

If they flat-out refuse:

Stay calm. Don’t push. Try again in a few days, using gentle curiosity:

> “Dad, you mentioned feeling more tired last week. Would you be open to just a quick check-in with the GP? I’ll do the booking and come along.”

Or start smaller:

> “Why don’t we pop in for your annual check-up? It’s been a while.”

Preparing for the appointment

A few minutes of preparation make all the difference. It helps the GP see the full picture and ensures Mum or Dad gets the best possible care.

Bring:

- ◯ Your early warning signs checklist, with a few examples highlighted.
- ◯ A list of current medications (including supplements).
- ◯ Medical background: current conditions, recent illnesses or hospital visits.
- ◯ Any recent scans, blood test results, and specialist letters (the GP may already have copies of these).
- ◯ Glasses, hearing aids or mobility aids.
- ◯ Medicare card and concession cards, such as DVA or Seniors Card (if applicable).
- ◯ A support person (you) and your questions (see a list of suggested questions below).

What to say and ask in the appointment

Start gently:

> “We’ve noticed a few changes lately and wanted to check in to make sure everything’s okay.”

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Focus on what you’ve observed.

Helpful questions to ask:

- “Could these changes be related to memory or thinking problems?”
- “Are there other medical reasons that could be contributing, like medication side-effects, vitamin deficiencies, infection, etc.?”
- “Should we do any tests or referrals at this stage?”
- “Would a geriatrician or memory clinic be helpful?”
- “If there is something more serious going on, like dementia or another condition, what treatments or supports are available?”
- “What can we do now to help Mum/Dad stay well and safe at home?”
- “When should we follow up, and with whom?”

After the appointment

Take a breath. Whatever the outcome, you’ve taken one of the most important steps in helping your mum or dad to stay as healthy and independent as possible, for as long as possible, truly.

If the GP identifies an issue, remember: early clarity means more control.
If everything looks fine, you’ve gained peace of mind and a clear baseline to monitor over time.

Make sure you note down what was discussed and any next steps, then check in with Mum or Dad after a few weeks to see how things are going.

Now that you’ve got the medical side of things going, you might also want to think about having some more care and support for Mum or Dad at home. If you’re feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or confused about how to discuss and successfully introduce home care, take a look at our Mable and Melissa Levi guide on how to introduce home care successfully.



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