Years ago, Bob Wellington and his wife, Juanita, faced the question of whether or not to schedule a medical evaluation for dementia. They went from noticing something was different, to getting tested, and eventually, to understanding the benefits of an early diagnosis.

They also learned that getting evaluated can be complicated and take time. Based on their experience, here's what you can expect during the medical evaluation process.

You can hear about Bob and Juanita's journey and insights by watching **their video**.

Your medical evaluation: what to expect

by Bob and Juanita Wellington

An initial medical work-up, performed in partnership with a primary care provider, may include:

- A review of the patient's history and medications
- A comprehensive physical exam
- Brief tests of memory and thinking
- Lab tests

It will be helpful to bring with you:

- Specific examples of changes you have noticed that concern you or others
- A list of questions you want to ask
- Someone who knows you well who can provide information and support

The provider may also talk to a patient's loved one about changes they've observed in the person's thinking, mood or behavior. This may be done at the initial appointment or by phone afterward.

Depending on the results, the provider may refer you to a specialist for further evaluation. These evaluations may include:

- A brain scan
- Additional lab tests
- Referral to sleep medicine or a hearing evaluation
- More extensive testing of thinking, memory and behavior

Many treatable conditions can affect thinking, such as depression, sleep apnea, and vascular disease, as well as a number of medications. The specialist can help distinguish between a treatable condition, normal signs of aging, mild cognitive impairment, and more serious signs of dementia.

Sometimes diagnosis can be a complex process and a number of visits over time may be needed. These visits provide an important opportunity to build a care team and make plans for longer-term strategies and support.

If you would like a way to make note of changes you notice, this tool may help:
https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-dementia-10-signs-worksheet.pdf