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Signs of dementia and how to support the person, their families and their friends

209,600 people will develop dementia this year, that's one every three minutes. Dementia can affect a person at any age but it is more commonly diagnosed in people over the age of 65 years.

Indeed, 1 in 6 people over the age of 80 have dementia and seventy percent of people in care homes have dementia or severe memory problems. If somebody develops dementia before the age of 65 they are described as having young onset dementia.

Dementia is an umbrella term for a range of progressive conditions that affect the brain. There are over 200 subtypes of dementia and it can also be a secondary condition of another disease, such as Parkinsons. The most common types of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Regardless of which type of dementia is diagnosed and what part of the brain is affected, each person will experience dementia in their own unique way.

Signs that could indicate a person has Dementia

Memory problems – people with dementia might have problems retaining new information. They might get lost in previously familiar places and may struggle with names. Relatives might notice the person seems increasingly forgetful, misplacing things regularly.

Cognitive ability – people with dementia may have difficulty processing information. This could be their perception of time or a place, for example, getting up in the middle of the night to go to work, even though they're retired. Also their concentration could be affected. There may be a difficulty when shopping with choosing the items and

then paying for them. For some people the ability to reason and make decisions may also be affected. Some may get a sense of restlessness and prefer to keep moving than sit still; others may be reluctant to take part in activities they used to enjoy.

Communication – people with dementia may repeat themselves often or have difficulty finding the right words. Reading and writing might become challenging.

Changes in behaviour – they might experience changes in personality, mood swings, anxiety and depression. They can lose interest in seeing others socially. Following and engaging

in conversation can be difficult and tiring, and so a formerly outgoing person might become quieter and more introverted. Their self-confidence might also be affected.

Differences engaging with their surroundings – people with dementia can experience changes in vision and hearing as their brain processes information in a different way. People can view everyday items in their home and in the outside world in a different ways such as walking round the rug in the living room, becoming hesitant getting into the car, being apprehensive stepping off the kerb. People can find noisy places very disturbing and can find it challenging to participating in large group conversations.

Everybody assumes the first sign of dementia is memory loss, but this not always the case.

The other signs described above can change earlier. Furthermore, the changes can be intermittent and vary in their severity. People living with dementia can often describe a feeling of mist coming over them and then lifting. These symptoms of dementia gradually get worse over time. How quickly this happens varies from person to person – and some people stay independent for years

If someone is showing symptoms associated with dementia it is important to contact your GP. There are many conditions that have similar symptoms to dementia, including, infections, thyroid problems, vitamin B12 deficiency, sleep apnoea, stress, anxiety and depression.





Dementia Diagnosis and Next Steps

To establish if dementia is present, a GP will take a medical and family history of the person, and will screen them for mental health and cognitive issues by: asking questions, testing concentration, short term memory, mood and behaviour changes. The GP may then request blood tests, an MRI or CT scan to examine the structure of the brain, or request a chest X-ray to check for any chest conditions. They may also refer the person to a memory service/clinic, or to a specialist for further investigation and assessment.

If a diagnosis of dementia is given, the GP should then ensure that the person with the diagnosis and their family are made aware of any specialist advice and support services in their area, as well as referring them for further assessments and treatments that may help.

Dementia UK have produced a next steps checklist, to help in the early days after your family member has received a diagnosis of dementia here is a [link](#) to it. If you don't have access to the internet, you can call the Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline on **0800 888 6678** or email helpline@dementiauk.org

Being diagnosed with dementia can understandably cause distress and a feeling of hopelessness, and some people may feel anxious or depressed. It may be that the person is finding it difficult to adjust emotionally. Equally, the dementia changes happening in the brain can make it difficult to control their emotions. The person with dementia may also struggle to understand the emotions of those around them. Understanding and recognising the impact of these symptoms may help you to understand the reasons the person is showing distress and help you to give the best type of support.

Family members are equally likely to have difficulty in accepting the diagnosis and the changes dementia can cause to the person and the relationship they have with them. It's important to ensure everybody takes the time to understand how one another is feeling.



Supporting the person with dementia, their family and their friends

There is evidence that people living with dementia can remain healthy, with a good sense of wellbeing, by being active and socially engaged. People who focus on their strengths, and the things they like and want to do, are able to cope better with the changes that dementia can bring, and can continue enjoying their life. Research also shows that those people with memory loss who withdraw from activities and who become socially isolated, are more likely to be bored, distressed and deteriorate more rapidly.

Emotional Support

Here are some things you can do to provide emotional support to the person with dementia, help their family and friends recognise and cope with their role as a carer and identify how best to live a life not defined by their disease.

Share thoughts and feelings with family and trusted friends. Isolation and bottling things up always, always make things worse.

Focus on the person with dementia's strengths and think about what they can still do, rather than what they can't.

Prioritise things that bring them peace and joy, such as listening to music, dancing or walking in the garden.

Stay active and involved in your hobbies and social networks, as a carer you need to look after your own wellbeing.

It is important for people with dementia to look after their physical health. This can be social and fun, and could include walking, yoga, dancing or swimming.

Make sure they maintain a healthy weight by enjoying a balanced diet including whole grains, fruit, vegetables and fish.

Drink 1.5 litres of fluids daily (ideally water), reduce the amount of caffeine and stick to the government advised alcohol limits.

If they smoke, help and encourage them to stop. Smoking can increase the risk of physical and cognitive conditions.

Getting enough sleep is vital as poor sleep can affect concentration and cognitive function.

Share the diagnosis with family, friends and colleagues. Telling people what is going on can lead to more understanding and support.

Try to avoid negative comments and correcting the person if they get something wrong or muddled up.



Take a day at a time, rather than looking too much in the future. Focus on what is achievable now.

Dementia Specific Support

Seek out advice, support, education and training.

Investigate local services.

Join a social or peer support group. These can be attended in person or online. It can be helpful to know other people who have similar experiences and who may have some good advice and support to offer.

Investigate any companionship and befriending schemes in your area.

Develop coping strategies to live as well as possible with the diagnosis.

Plan for the future, have a family discussion about future plans, including applying for a Lasting Power of Attorney and making an Advance Care Plan.

Understand financial support, attendance allowance, council tax relief.

Consider adapting social situations so they are easier to manage, reduce the number of people they see to just a few at a time and reduce the number of distractions when communicating to one thing at a time.

Adapt the person's home to make it as safe and comfortable for them as possible.

Make sure the person with dementia regularly has their physical health monitored and ensure they receive the appropriate health advice or treatment.

If the person with dementia is having trouble remembering where they keep things, you could try keeping important items in one, consistent place. Using a whiteboard or similar showing reminders for the person.

Identify dementia friendly places to visit.

Understand how to make travel more dementia friendly.

There are several dementia charities and organisations who have great websites providing information, support, tips and activities. Details can be found on the next page.



Support & Sources of Information

NHS

www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia

www.wales.nhs.uk

www.nhsinform.scot

[Dementia UK](#)

[Alzheimers Association](#)

[Alzheimers research uk](#)

[MindforYou](#)

AGE UK

www.ageuk.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru

www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland

www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland

Police Mutual Services

Worrying about money can be extremely stressful and may lead to mental health conditions. Police Mutual are here to help.

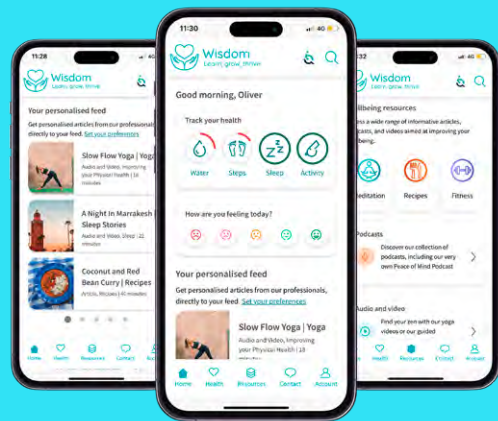
We've teamed up with [PayPlan*](#), one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call [PayPlan*](#) on **0800 197 8433**.

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support. Take a look at the e-portal or download the APP.

Wisdom App



Download the **Health Assured App** and register today - your code is **MHA107477**

Police Mutual

To read more of our wellbeing guides take a look at the wellbeing pages on the NARPO website.

Visit policemutual.co.uk



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