

# Worried about your MEMORY?



‘I remember that holiday as clear as can be... but it’s a struggle to recall what I did this morning.’



'I had my first inkling that something wasn't quite right when I took up dancing. As hard as I tried I couldn't remember the steps from one lesson to the next. It became a bit of a joke in the class. But I'd always had such a good memory that to me it wasn't funny it was worrying.'

This booklet is designed to help you understand more about memory loss, so that if you are worried – either about your own or someone else's memory – you can seek advice and, if necessary, get treatment and support.

## In this booklet you will find information about

- What causes memory problems
- Seeing the GP
- Help that's available
- What you can do to help yourself
- How you may be able to protect your memory

## Should I worry?

It's happened to all of us at some time or another. You can't put a name to a face. You forget where you put your keys. You can't remember where you parked the car. Most of the time, such slips are a nuisance rather than a sign of something more serious.

But if you are worried that your memory – or that of someone you know – is getting noticeably worse, or if forgetfulness is beginning to have a knock-on effect on everyday life, it is worth sharing your worries and seeking advice. That's because memory problems can sometimes be an early sign of a medical condition such as dementia.

## What can cause memory problems?

Memory problems are common. Many of us notice that our memory becomes less reliable as we get older. Tiredness, stress, overwork, anxiety, depression, some physical illnesses and/or the side-effects of certain medications can all be factors too. And, of course, some of us have always been absent-minded. But sometimes forgetfulness can be an early sign of dementia.

## What is dementia?

The term dementia refers to problems with memory, thinking and behaviour. It is not an illness in itself but a result of physical changes in the brain. Dementia can be caused by a number of different medical conditions, including Alzheimer's disease.

The good news is that today there is plenty of help available for people with dementia. And there are treatments, which can sometimes improve symptoms and slow down the progression of dementia. So the earlier you get advice the better.

## What should I do if I am worried?

If you have memory problems have a chat with your GP, who will address your concerns or arrange for further investigation.

Alternatively, call the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline on **0845 300 0336** (8.30am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday), which is staffed by trained advisers who will listen to your concerns and can help you decide what to do next.

If you are worried about someone else's memory it is worth encouraging them to make an appointment to see their GP. If they are reluctant, you could offer to go with them or suggest that they go for a general physical check-up. The main thing is to seek advice as soon as possible. Bear in mind that there are many reasons for forgetfulness apart from dementia.

## Do any of these sound familiar?

Seek help without delay if your memory is not as good as it used to be and especially if you:

- struggle to remember recent events, although you can easily recall things that happened in the past
- find it hard to follow conversations or programmes on TV
- forget the names of friends or everyday objects
- cannot recall things you have heard, seen or read
- find it difficult to make decisions
- notice that you repeat yourself or lose the thread of what you are saying
- have problems thinking and reasoning
- feel anxious, depressed or angry about your forgetfulness
- find that other people start to comment on your forgetfulness.

## Seeing the GP and getting help

The GP may take details of your – or the person's – medical history, do a physical exam and perform other tests to check for any underlying problems. They may then be able to talk you through the symptoms and prescribe or treat any medical conditions that become evident.

The GP may refer you to a local memory clinic or specialist for further assessment and tests.

## What if it is dementia?

Whether a diagnosis of dementia comes as a shock or confirms your suspicions, you could experience a range of emotions – you may feel numb, frightened, angry, worried, sad, guilty or frustrated. However, you may also feel relieved to find there is a medical reason for the memory problems.

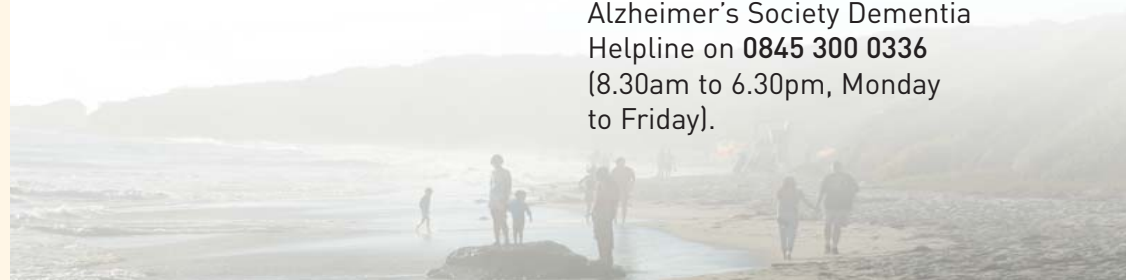
Although there is no cure for dementia, with treatment and support many people who have the condition manage to lead active, fulfilling lives.

If dementia is caused by Alzheimer's disease, for example, the specialist may be able to prescribe drugs that can slow down its progression in the early to middle stages. Although these do not work for everyone, they can relieve symptoms for many people.

Your local social services department can do an assessment and may be able to arrange or provide services to help.

The Alzheimer's Society can be a vital support. With around 250 branches in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it provides help, advice and support for carers and people affected by dementia. The branch services range from support groups for carers and people with dementia to providing crucial information such as fact sheets and booklets.

To find out more contact the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline on **0845 300 0336** (8.30am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday).



## How can I help my memory?

If you are experiencing memory problems there are plenty of things you can do to help make life easier. Here are some tips that other people have found helpful.

### Coping with everyday life

- Keep track by making 'to do' lists of tasks.
- Break up tasks into bite-sized chunks to make them more manageable.
- Try to do one thing at a time – tackling too many things at once can be confusing.
- Try to have a routine to give structure to your day and help you remember what you are supposed to be doing.
- Take your time – there's no hurry.

### Memory aids

- Use clocks, wear a watch, put up a calendar and think about taking a daily newspaper to help you keep track of time.
- Consider keeping a diary in which you can note down appointments, 'to do' lists and anything else you want to remember.

- Use sticky-backed notes to help remind you of things you have to do.
- Keep important things such as money, keys or spectacles in the same place, so you always know where to find them.
- Keep important phone numbers by the phone so they are always on hand.
- Arrange to pay regular bills by direct debit or standing order.

It can take a while to get into the habit of using these memory aids, so give yourself time and persevere.

### Dealing with other people

- Try not to be embarrassed if you forget something. If the right word or piece of information escapes you don't try too hard. Once you stop trying it will often pop into your head.
- We all need help from time to time and other people are usually only too happy to be asked. Talk to family and friends about how they can help and support you.

## Help protect your memory

Is there any way to reduce your risk of developing dementia? The good news is that we are finding out a great deal about risk factors for Alzheimer's and other kinds of dementia. While age, genetic inheritance and medical history are risk factors, others such as diet, exercise and lifestyle are thought to have influence too. Of course, no one can guarantee that you will not develop dementia. But some of the following may help keep your brain healthy and your memory sharp as you age.

- **Look after your heart.** There are strong links between a healthy heart and a healthy brain. Protecting your heart by eating a diet low in saturated fat with plenty of fruit and vegetables and exercising regularly can help protect your brain too.
- **Go for fish.** Omega 3 fatty acids found in oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and herrings may benefit the brain, so put them on the menu once a week.
- **Skip the salt.** High blood pressure is a risk for Alzheimer's and some other kinds of dementia. Eat fewer processed foods and don't add extra salt to your food.
- **Check it out.** Ask your GP to check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels so you can get treatment if they are raised.
- **Don't smoke.** Your GP can help you quit and can prescribe stop smoking aids such as nicotine patches.
- **Moderate alcohol intake.** Heavy drinking affects short term memory, while a persistent high alcohol intake raises the risk of stroke, which is linked to some types of dementia. Stick to recommended limits and avoid binges.
- **Watch your head.** Serious head injury is a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. So always wear a seatbelt in the car, a cycle helmet if you cycle, and observe speed limits.
- **Use your brain.** Your brain works better if you use it, so enjoy an active social life and challenge yourself with new interests and hobbies.



**‘To be honest I was relieved that my daughter persuaded me to go to the doctor. I’d been worried about my forgetfulness for some time. And, although I had tried to**

**convince myself that there was nothing wrong, in a way it was a relief to get a diagnosis. I had an illness. I wasn’t going mad or having a breakdown. I thought well, best foot forward, I can cope with this.’**

It can be scary to face up to memory problems. It may seem easier to struggle on trying to disguise growing forgetfulness or to persuade yourself that it’s all part and parcel of growing older. But people with dementia often say that it comes as a relief to get a diagnosis. And getting the right treatment and support can make all the difference. So, if you are

worried, contact your GP or call the Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Helpline on **0845 300 0336** (8.30am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday) for confidential help from our trained advisers.

**Remember: the earlier you seek help, the sooner you can get on with living your life to the full. So don’t delay. Act now.**

