

Booklets in the Living with dementia series



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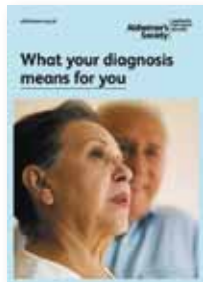
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Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline
England and Wales 0845 3000 336 Northern Ireland 028 9066 4100

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Living alone



Having a diagnosis of dementia should not prevent you making your own choices about how you live. There are clear benefits for remaining in your own home – especially as you may feel happier and more in control there. With the right help and support, you may be able to stay independent for a long time.

‘I feel safe because everyone knows me; shopkeepers, the church, my neighbours.’

Coping strategies

This booklet outlines several practical strategies for coping with living alone. If you can make your home as safe and secure as possible, and know that you have minimised the physical risks of living alone, you will be more able to cope with the emotional challenges that your illness may bring.



Support network

In the early stages of your illness, you are likely to be able to manage very well on your own. You may not even notice much difference in your day-to-day life. This is a good time to plan for the future when you may need more help to remain independent.

Several sources of support are available to you. It may be helpful to consider all of these and think about which ones may work best for you: everyone is different, and you need to be happy with the support you get. It's also a good idea to find out which services are available in your area, as these do vary considerably.



Friends and family

You may feel anxious about being a burden, but your closest friends and family members are likely to want to support you. It may help them – and you – if there are a few people you can turn to for help rather than relying on just one person.

Social services

Your council provides different types of help. The first step is to talk to your local council (the number will be in the phone book) or your GP to find out what is available. Your needs will be assessed to decide what type of help you might be entitled to (see Alzheimer's Society factsheet 418 Community care assessment). Some councils will provide help with the following:

- **Domestic help.** Help with housework or shopping. These services can also be arranged privately, and sometimes social services will co-ordinate this to check references and to make sure you are safe in your home.
- **Personal care.** Help with personal care, such as washing or dressing or getting ready to go out.
- **Day care.** An opportunity to be with other people during the day. Day care centres can help you to feel less isolated, offer social activities and also provide services such as chiropody and hairdressing. A hot lunch is usually provided and transport to and from day care can also usually be arranged.

For practical information on all aspects of living with dementia contact the National Dementia Helpline on 0845 3000 336 (England and Wales) or 028 9066 4100 (Northern Ireland) or visit alzheimers.org.uk

Voluntary agencies

Alzheimer's Society and other local voluntary agencies provide information and support through services including day care (page 3), advocacy, befriending schemes, drop-in centres or cafés and peer support groups.

‘They ask Rose to get her diary and write the instructions in it while they’re on the phone. They then ask her to read it back to them.’



State benefits

People with dementia may be entitled to state benefits. For example, you will be entitled to disability living allowance or attendance allowance. If someone is caring for you, they may be entitled to carer's allowance. You can call the Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 882200 for more information.

Some of the forms can be complicated and confusing, and you may also need to be persistent to get the help you need. There are people who can help you through the benefits system:

- a professional, such as a social worker
- your local social security office, pension centre or Jobcentre Plus office
- the Department for Work and Pensions
- voluntary organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

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Managing money

Managing your money can become a challenge. As with all aspects of your life, it helps if you keep things simple. You can work out how much cash you need each week, for example, and withdraw this amount once a week and keep it in the same place. If you don't feel comfortable using a cashpoint you can always ask the cashier in the bank, or request cash when paying with a debit card in the supermarket.

It makes things easier for you if all your bills are paid directly from your bank account each month. Most regular bills, such as gas, electricity, water, TV licence and council tax, can be paid by direct debit. Your suppliers will be able to help you set this up.

Some people find it helpful to have a joint account with someone who can help manage their money. This doesn't have to be someone you live with, or your husband or wife. It could be one of your children, or someone else you trust (see Alzheimer's Society booklet, Managing your money). Another option is to take out a property and affairs lasting power of attorney. This enables you to transfer responsibility for aspects of looking after your finances when you are no longer able to manage them yourself.

Safety and security

There are several things you can do to make yourself feel more secure and safe. Ask your GP for an assessment from an occupational therapist: they will visit you at home and suggest ways of making your home safer. These may include adaptations such as handrails, ramps and extra heating. If you need to make major changes to your home, you may be able to get a government grant to help with the cost. The occupational therapist can advise you on this.

In general:

- keep a list of emergency telephone numbers where you can find it easily
- keep other useful information accessible too: where the meters are; where the stopcock is; where fuses are kept; where to find the first aid box
- keep a diary in a prominent place and write appointments down
- have appliances checked regularly
- always use qualified professionals to maintain appliances.

See Alzheimer's Society booklet, Keeping safe in your home, for more information.

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Assistive technology

‘Assistive technology’ means any product or service that helps you remain independent. It can be something as simple as a walking stick or as advanced as satellite technology to find you if you are lost. You can get advice from social services or occupational therapists about what might be useful for you.

Telecare, a remotely operated care system, links sensors around your home to a call centre by a telephone line. The sensors monitor movement in your home and alert the centre when things might be going wrong. For example, sensors might be able to detect if you fall. They can also help by automatically turning a light on when you get up in the night.

‘I like living here. I can look out of the window and see what’s happening outside.’

Memory aids include devices such as recorded messages that remind you to take your keys when you open the front door. Or medication boxes might beep to remind you to take your medicine at the right time.

Tracking devices can help you feel safer when out and about. You carry the device with you, and most have a button to press if you get lost.

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Planning for the future

There may be a time when you might not be able to cope on your own. You can make choices now about how you want your future to be. You can think about residential care choices, or what medical treatment you might want. It is important to plan how your finances and property should be managed.

A lasting power of attorney (which has replaced an enduring power of attorney) allows you to choose someone to manage your affairs in future. You can choose one or more people to manage your property and financial affairs, and also to make personal and welfare decisions for you. You can make a lasting power of attorney if you already have a diagnosis of dementia, as long as you can show that you understand it and its legal significance (see Alzheimer's Society factsheet 472, Enduring power of attorney and lasting powers of attorney).

Conclusion

A diagnosis of dementia doesn't mean that you have to give up your independence. With the right help and support, you can continue to live in your own home for as long as you are able to.



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Useful contacts

Action for Advocacy

Action for Advocacy
The Oasis Centre
75 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7HS
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F 020 7921 4201
E info@actionforadvocacy.org.uk
www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk

Age UK

York House
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T 0800 169 8787 (general enquiries)
T 0800 169 6565 (advice line)
E contact@ageuk.org.uk
www.ageuk.org.uk
Age UK has been created by the merger
of Age Concern and Help the Aged.

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Preston PR1 1HB
T 0800 88 22 00
(free helpline – 8.30am-6.30pm
weekdays, 9.00am-1.00pm Saturdays)

0800 243 544 (textphone)
E BEL-Customer-Services@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
www.direct.gov.uk/disability-money

Carers UK

20 Great Dover Street
London SE1 4LX
T 020 7378 4999
F 020 7378 9781
E info@carersuk.org
www.carersuk.org

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

www.citizensadvice.org.uk
www.adviceguide.org.uk

Department for Work and Pensions

For details of your local office, go to
www.dwp.gov.uk/localoffice
For details of various helplines, go to
www.dwp.gov.uk/contact-us/contact-a-z/
T 08457 123456
E use the enquiry form on the website below
www.dwp.gov.uk

Foundation for Assistive Technology (FAST)

31 Scarborough Street
London E1 8DR
T 020 7264 8955
www.fastuk.org

Office of the Public Guardian
(for information about lasting
power of attorney)

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T 0300 456 0300
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