

5

things you
should know
about dementia

Leading the fight
against dementia

Alzheimer's
Society

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**Dementia is
not a natural
part of ageing**

When someone voices fears about becoming forgetful or confused, people often reassure them that this is a normal part of ageing. But are they right?

It is true that dementia is more common among over-65s, and some of us do become more forgetful as we get older, or during times of stress or illness. But dementia is a different sort of forgetfulness. Many of us may momentarily forget a friend's name. But if you have dementia, you may forget that you have ever met them before. Your memory loss will be more noticeable, and may be accompanied by mood changes and confusion.

Forgetfulness and confusion are not always signs of dementia, but it is very important to ask the doctor to check them out. Drugs are available that can help people with certain forms of dementia. Other medication can help with symptoms that often accompany dementia, like anxiety or insomnia. So if you aren't diagnosed, you could be missing out. And if you don't have dementia, your forgetfulness may indicate another condition – such as depression – that needs to be treated.

**To find out more about dementia, go to
alzheimers.org.uk**

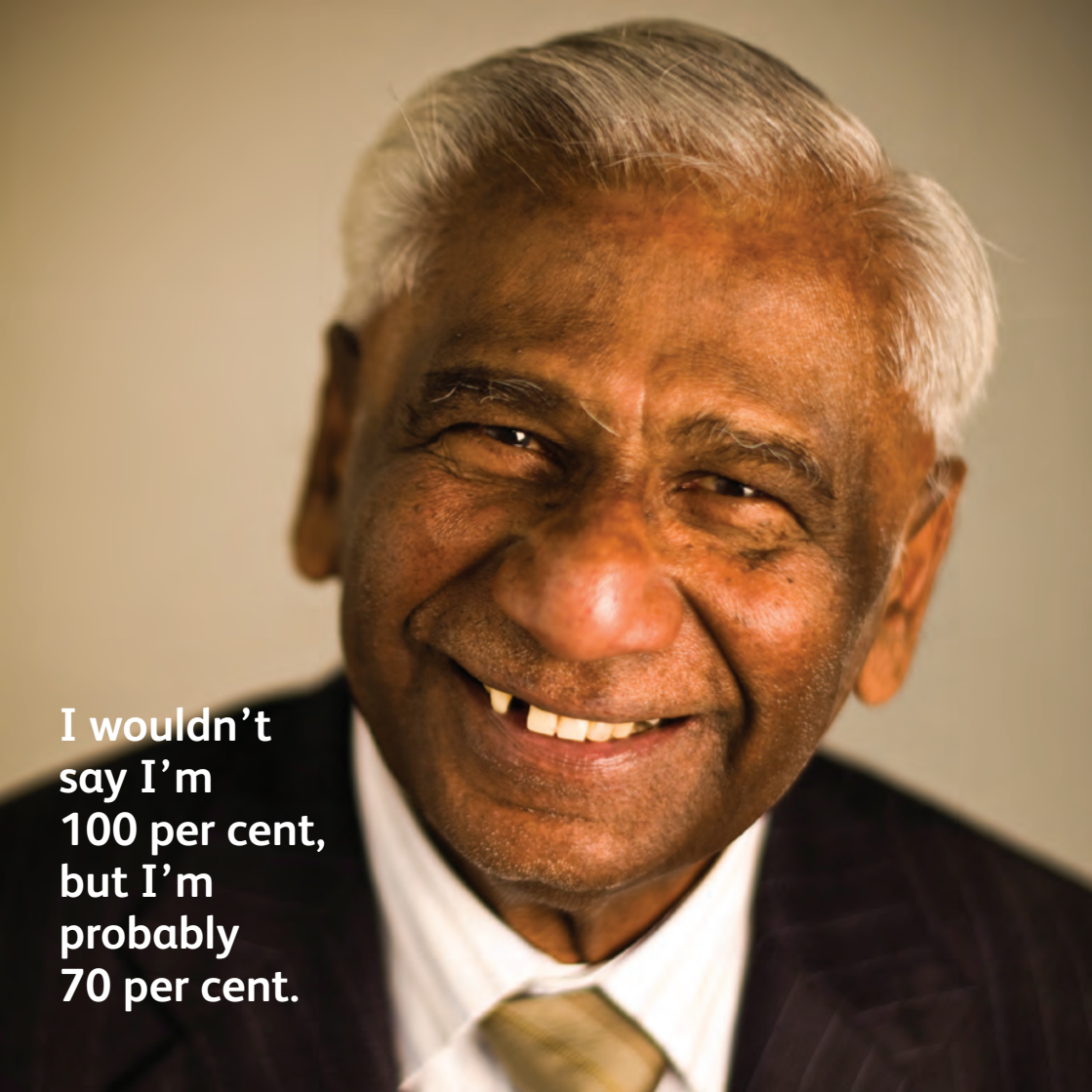
Poopal

After I came to the UK, my brain was not working properly. I used to go walking and not come back, and when my wife asked me to go shopping, instead of buying eggs I would buy tea. I was very worried. The doctors examined me and gave me medicine. Since then it's been much better. I still forget things – I wouldn't say I'm 100 per cent – but I'm probably 70 per cent.

I like reading, and we often go for three mile walks in the park. Sometimes we visit the neighbours or we go to the temple, or shopping with the children. I used to grow a lot of vegetables in the garden – aubergine, cabbages and sweet potato – which we cooked in curry with rice.

Our family is very close. We live with our son's family, and I am never alone – there are always people around us. They understand that I have memory problems, but they don't worry about these things. Our grandchildren are wonderful. In the early days, I used to carry them to kindergarten. Now they are growing up.

I am happy. I have had a really good life. My philosophy is to be happy with the family – the future is good for us.



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2

Dementia is
caused by diseases
of the brain

Dementia is the name for a collection of symptoms that include memory loss, mood changes and problems with communication and reasoning. These symptoms are brought about by a number of diseases that cause changes in the brain.

The most common of these is Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's changes the chemistry and structure of the brain, causing the brain cells to die off. The first sign is usually short-term memory loss. Other types of dementia include vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies and Pick's disease.

Each of these diseases affects the brain in slightly different ways. For example, Alzheimer's disease tends to progress gradually at first, while vascular dementia tends to progress in a stepped way.

But a person's experience of dementia will depend on other things too – the people around them, their personal circumstances, and the environment they live in. Dementia progresses in a way that is unique to each individual.

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alzheimers.org.uk**

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It's not just
about losing
your memory

People often think of dementia as a form of memory loss. And usually it does start by affecting people's short-term memory. But it's more than that: it can also affect the way people think, speak and do things.

Dementia makes it harder to do things because it makes it difficult to plan and learn new activities, and interferes with structured tasks like writing. Dementia can also make it harder to communicate. For example, the person might have trouble remembering the right word or recognising who someone is.

Dementia also affects people's mood and motivation levels. This may happen if the disease affects the part of your brain that controls emotions. But even where this does not happen, people with dementia can feel sad, frightened, frustrated or angry about what's happening to them.

Dementia can't be cured, but there is much that can be done to help. Every year we understand more about dementia, and develop new strategies that can help to boost someone's confidence and maintain their independence for as long as possible.

**To find out more about dementia, go to
[alzheimers.org.uk](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk)**

Clarice


Dementia – that’s what they told me I have. I’m very forgetful, and I don’t sleep much. At first, I just put it down to working too hard or something. I get so frustrated. You go somewhere and you can’t even remember what you want to buy. You just stand there in space, looking, wondering, ‘Is this the right place?’

I have to write things down. Sometimes, even if I write them down I don’t remember them. But I tell my family where I’m going and things, so somebody will ring me up and tell me what is happening. And my friend gave me a board to stick everything on.

I go to a dementia café once a week. I think there is a stigma around dementia. I think people look down on you and say, ‘That’s a mad woman,’ or something. At the café it doesn’t matter who you are – everybody’s on the same level. The social side is very good and the staff are fantastic.

I love singing – it lifts you. And if I feel down, I pray and talk to God. I ask him, ‘Why? Why am I like this?’ And then a scripture will come into my head or something, maybe one of the psalms. It is very, very comforting.

**To hear more of Clarice’s story, go to
alzheimers.org.uk/remembertheperson**



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4

It's possible
to live well
with dementia

Most of us have some image in our mind of what life with dementia looks like. That image is often very bleak. So it can be surprising to learn that many people with dementia continue to drive, socialise and hold down satisfying jobs. Even as dementia progresses, many people lead active, healthy lives, continue their hobbies, and enjoy loving friendships and relationships.

Someone with dementia will probably have difficulty remembering things and organising themselves. They may forget an appointment or tell you the same joke twice. But this may not stop them from doing the things that matter most to them.

Medication may help people with some kinds of dementia. This is why it's important to go to the doctor as soon as you suspect there may be a problem. It's a difficult step to take, but a diagnosis can open up many opportunities to help overcome problems and find better ways of coping.

Of course, dementia does make it harder to do certain things. But with the right support and know-how, it is possible for someone with dementia to get the very best out of life.

**To find out more about dementia, go to
alzheimers.org.uk**

Caroline


Most mornings I have breakfast with my partner, Tony, then he goes off to work and I decide what to do with my day. I do miss work, but when I started my last job I just couldn't manage it. I went to see the GP and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Twice a week I go walking and I'm in an a cappella choir. I'm still driving, so I'm not housebound by any means. I make sure I keep using my brain. I read three or four chapters a day. I try not to watch daytime television, but I do like Radio 4. And if it's a miserable rainy day I'll always put on Sex and the City to make me laugh.

We have systems so I don't forget something. We have a whiteboard with reminders. When we've done a task, we stick a little spot next to it. Tony will often phone and remind me to do things. I'm functioning very well, but everything is controlled. If I was suddenly thrown into Trafalgar Square, I wouldn't know what to do.

I'm certainly not in denial – I'd rather I didn't have it. But I don't dwell on it. To be able to drive, sing, use a computer quite happily – it's not the end of the world. That's been the most surprising thing about dementia. I'm still carrying on the way I always was. I'm just leading my life.

**To hear more of Caroline's story, go to
alzheimers.org.uk/remembertheperson**



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5

There's more
to a person than
the dementia

A talented gospel singer, a loving family man, a keen walker and self-confessed Radio 4 addict... Clarice, Poopal and Caroline, who we meet in these pages, are living proof that people with dementia can live rich, varied lives.

Clarice is a warm, outgoing woman who teases her daughters affectionately as they describe how they adapt family life to support Clarice's dementia day by day. Poopal is a quietly spoken, dignified man who is surrounded by a loving family. He takes great pride in their successes in their journey from Sri Lanka to London. Caroline is an engaging woman, with a wicked sense of humour, whose days are packed with social events. She enjoys close friendships and a strong, supportive relationship with her partner Tony.

Sometimes, dementia can overshadow the other aspects of the person – the bits that really matter. Poopal, Caroline and Clarice remind us of the person behind the dementia. They are three very different people, with just one thing in common: all three are living with dementia. But each is doing it in their own way, and on their own terms.

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About us

Poopal, 76

Poopal is a retired construction worker and dedicated family man. Born in Sri Lanka, Poopal followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, working in the government public works department. Poopal saved up to send both his sons to study in England, where they settled. He and his wife joined them here after retirement, 14 years ago.



Poopal adapted quickly to life in England: 'Everyone welcomed us nicely,' he says. He became an active member of the local Tamil community and the Hindu temple, and was an involved grandfather, taking his grandchildren to nursery.

Today Poopal is still very active, and enjoys walking and playing badminton in the garden with his son. But above all he lives for his family, and dotes on his sons, his grandchildren and, most of all, his wife.

Clarice, 78

Retired nurse Clarice grew up in Jamaica, in Saint Ann. 'It was lovely,' she says. 'It's got everything – the sea, the rivers, the falls, the fruits'. She excelled at maths, and as a tomboy spent her days playing cricket and climbing trees.



Clarice initially found it hard to adjust to the smog of 1950s London, but after her nursing training she never looked back. As well as raising

six children and working as a nurse in the prison service, Clarice sang at her local church, where she also ran the Sunday school and senior citizens' club.

Today, aged 78, Clarice lives in south London close to her family. Clarice is in her element when her children and grandchildren come to visit her. When the dementia gets her down, Clarice turns to prayer and apple turnovers with fresh cream.

Caroline, 55

Caroline is an active member of her local community who leads a busy social life. Living near Skipton with her partner Tony, she joins organised walks with the University of the Third Age twice a week, sings in a choir, and is an ardent fan of Radio 4.



An oboe player, Caroline studied music and worked in production at BBC World Service and at a record label before retraining in IT. She first noticed signs of dementia when she took a new administrative job – what she had hoped would be ‘an easy job’ – and found that she could not cope with the duties. She went to the doctor and was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease at the age of 52.

Caroline is adamant that dementia need not affect your quality of life. ‘I don’t dwell on it,’ she says, ‘I just lead a normal life, really.’

About Alzheimer's Society

Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications, National Dementia Helpline, website, and more than 2,000 local services. We campaign for better quality of life for people with dementia and greater understanding of dementia. We also fund an innovative programme of medical and social research into the cause, cure and prevention of dementia and the care people receive.

For more information about how to get involved, visit our website at **alzheimers.org.uk/getinvolved**

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Dementia Awareness Week™ 2012



Leading the fight
against dementia

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