Worried about your memory?

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

alzheimers.org.uk

Leading the fight against dementia

Alzheimer’s Society

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.

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 memory loss 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, being overworked, 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 more absentminded than others. But sometimes memory loss can be an early sign of dementia.

What is dementia?

Dementia is not a single illness but a group of symptoms caused by damage to the brain. The symptoms include loss of memory, mood changes and confusion. Dementia is caused by a number of different diseases of the brain, including Alzheimer's disease.

Vascular dementia is the second most common cause after Alzheimer's disease. High blood pressure, heart problems, high cholesterol and diabetes can increase the chances of developing vascular dementia so it is important these conditions are identified and treated at the earliest opportunity.

What signs should I look for?

You should 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

– 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 memory loss

– find that other people start to comment on your memory loss

– feel confused even when in a familiar environment.

What should I do if I am worried?

If you are worried about your memory have a chat with your GP, who will address your concerns or arrange for further investigation. You may be referred to a local memory clinic or specialist for assessment where a formal diagnosis can be made.

Bear in mind that there are many reasons for memory loss apart from dementia. However, the earlier you seek help the better as there may be support or treatment available that can help you.

More information is available at:
alzheimers.org.uk/memoryworry

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.

In some cases a specialist may be able to prescribe drugs that can temporarily alleviate some symptoms.

Your local social services department can do an assessment and may be able to arrange or provide services to support you at home.

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

Christine's story

'I started to notice that my memory was getting worse, and that when I was talking to people I was struggling to remember the right words. For a while I simply put it down to the fact I was getting older – but it got worse, and my family were concerned, so I went to see my GP.

The GP referred me to a specialist who did some tests, and I was diagnosed with dementia. Although it wasn't the news we wanted to hear, I'm very pleased that I didn't delay speaking to the doctor. It was a relief to know what was wrong, and since my diagnosis I've been able to receive support and treatment to help manage my symptoms.

Now I can carry on doing the things that I want to do, like my swimming, my yoga, and spending time with the family.'

Christine Anderson

How Alzheimer's Society can help

If you are concerned about memory problems or would like to know more about the symptoms of dementia, log on to **alzheimers.org.uk/memoryworry**

Alzheimer's Society provides a range of information and support services on all aspects of dementia. Society staff and volunteers deliver over 2,000 services across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to people affected by dementia in their communities. Our local services provide both practical support and opportunities to meet people in a similar situation.

Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline has trained advisers ready to discuss your concerns about any form of dementia. Our website also hosts an online support and discussion forum, Talking Point, for anyone affected by dementia.

Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline
028 9066 4100
Monday – Friday 9.30am – 4.30pm

To log on to Talking Point and find out about the range of information and local services available visit **alzheimers.org.uk**

If you are worried, contact your GP. Remember the earlier you seek help, the sooner you can make the most of your life.

So don't delay. Act now.

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These materials have been developed by Alzheimer's Society and are being produced with financial support from Lilly and Credit Suisse.

Alzheimer's Society operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Registered charity no. 296645.
Company limited by guarantee and registered in England no. 2115499.