Living alone

If you live alone, there are lots of reasons to keep doing so after a diagnosis of dementia.

You may feel happier and more in control in a familiar place, or you may want to keep your routines and stay in your community. Keeping your independence may also be important to you.

You may need to think a bit more about some things, such as how to stay in touch with people or manage day-to-day tasks, but you can continue to be safe, independent and in touch while living alone.

In this booklet we explain some of the things you may want to think about if you live alone. We outline practical strategies for dealing with the challenges you may come across, and the help and support that is available to you. By taking some of these small steps you will be able to stay independent for longer.

In this booklet we look at:
- your support network
- staying in touch
- loneliness and depression
- staying active
- dementia-friendly communities
- managing everyday tasks
- staying safe and independent
- money and financial issues
- planning for the future
- when you can no longer live alone
- services and support.
Living alone with dementia

Some people with dementia choose to live alone. You may enjoy your lifestyle as it is now and want to remain independent and in your own home.

Some people live alone because of their circumstances. You may find yourself alone after a partner has died, or someone you lived with has moved out. You may not have a partner, family or friends you can move in with.

You might live in a rural area, where it can be harder to get to the nearest shop or to visit people. Or you might live in a city where there is better transport but less sense of community.

Everyone’s situation will be different, but if you are living alone with dementia then this booklet is for you. It will be useful for you regardless of where you live, why you live alone or how much support you have.

For more information visit alzheimers.org.uk
Living with dementia: Living alone

Living alone, not being alone

A good support network

Having a good support network in place can really help when you live alone. This can include family, friends, neighbours or professionals. They might offer help with practical things you find difficult, look out for your wellbeing, or just be there to talk to and spend time with you.

Asking for and accepting help can be difficult. You may feel that it will stop you being independent. However, having people around who can help you if you need it will mean you can stay living alone for longer.

You may have lots of people who are there for you. But if you haven’t, it can be a good idea to put support in place as soon as you feel ready. You might not need much help right now, but talking to people about your diagnosis as soon as you feel ready can be reassuring. That way you will know there is help and support on hand when you do.

‘Pop along to your local dementia café and speak to one of the advisers and hopefully you’ll meet other people. The dementia cafés are there to help and not everyone is old.’

Daughter of a person living with dementia
The following tips can help you put a support network in place.

■ Talk to people about how they can help you and what would be best for you. You can focus on what you can still do, and they can help with some of the things you find more difficult. This might be remembering to take your medication, managing the garden or shopping for food.

■ Consider telling people about your diagnosis, so they can offer you support if you need it. When people understand, they will be able to offer you help and make sure it is tailored to your needs.

■ If you don’t have family or friends who can help you, you may want to speak to other people in your community, such as neighbours, shopkeepers, people from a place of worship or your pharmacist or landlord. They may be able to help with things like lifts into town, shopping, gardening or simply calling in or phoning to see how you are.

■ If you don’t feel comfortable telling people about your diagnosis, you could just say that you need a bit of help with some things from time to time.

■ Keep a list of contacts by your phone so you can reach them if you need to.
Leave a set of keys with a neighbour you trust.

Find out what support is available where you live. This could be from social services, a homecare agency or a local charity (such as Age UK). This support can include help with meals, cleaning and household jobs, gardening, transport and more – contact your local social services or local Alzheimer’s Society for more information or see ‘Services and support’ on page 27.

Find out if there are any events that are set up for people with dementia (dementia-friendly events) happening in your community. For more see ‘Dementia-friendly communities’ on page 14.

You may find that the people around you have different views on what you can and should do. They may think you need more help than you actually do. It’s important to talk honestly to people about what they can do to help and what you can manage by yourself. Work together to come up with ways you can get the support you need. Try not to take it personally if they disagree with you – they are probably concerned or worried about you and trying to do what they can to help.
Staying in touch

You shouldn’t feel cut off or isolated from other people just because you live alone. Having dementia can make it harder to do things, and this can mean that you see people less than you used to. It may be even more difficult if you live in a rural area and don’t have people or services you can get to. However, there are still things you can do to stop yourself feeling isolated.

Getting out of the house and seeing other people, continuing to enjoy your hobbies, or just keeping in touch with friends and family are all important. The following tips may help.

- Talk to other people regularly. You could arrange regular phone calls or visits with friends and family members.

- If you don’t always want to be the person to make the first contact, you could tell people that this is how you are and ask them to call or drop in from time to time.

- If you have a computer, smart phone or tablet, consider using a video calling programme such as Skype or social media to stay in touch with people. You may prefer Skype to a phone call because you can see the person you’re talking to.

- Going to a local support or activity group is a really good way of staying socially active. You might also meet new people who are in a similar situation. If you use the internet you may find an online support group helpful. There are also video conferencing support groups available on Facebook and Zoom that you might want to try.

For more information visit alzheimers.org.uk
See if there are any befriending opportunities in your area, or services such as Alzheimer’s Society’s Side by Side. A befriender is someone who comes and spends time with you regularly, either in your home or out in the community. This can allow you to continue your hobbies, take part in activities, or just have some companionship. You could also consider telephone befriending, where someone phones you regularly.

If you don’t have any family members or friends, or if you are no longer in touch, there are still ways of getting emotional support. Online communities or forums allow you to talk to other people with dementia. They can be a useful source of support, and there will be lots of other people who are in a similar situation. Alzheimer’s Society’s Dementia Talking Point is a good place to start – go to alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint.

Small things such as going to the local shop to buy a paper each day can give you a chance to talk to someone and to feel more involved in the community.

“Our local town has been amazing, the majority of shops have all signed up to become dementia friendly, with a huge push on the streets for people to become dementia friends too (even my 5 year old and 7 year old kids became dementia friends when the charity visited their school). I think this is great.’

Carer for a person living with dementia
Loneliness and depression

It is normal to feel lonely sometimes. However, if you don’t have people around you, or find it hard to stay in touch, you may start to feel lonely more often.

Loneliness can make you feel less like doing things, which can make you feel more isolated. It’s important to try to break this cycle.

If you spend a lot of time on your own and don’t have much contact with others, or don’t have ways of occupying your time, you might become depressed. This is more than just feeling sad from time to time. Depression is when feelings of sadness and hopelessness take over your life. It is a serious condition that can have a big effect on your life, but there are things you can do to deal with it and there is support available.

If you’re feeling lonely or depressed, the following may help.

- Talking about your feelings is often the first step in dealing with them. If you feel lonely, low or depressed it can help to talk to other people such as friends or family. Try telling them how you are feeling. If people know that you aren’t feeling good, they may keep in touch or visit more regularly.

- Try to do something you enjoy or something new – go to a new group or visit a museum, community or sports centre, for example. Doing something you enjoy might make you feel better.

- Exercise can help if you’re feeling depressed or lonely. It can be difficult when you’re feeling low, but even going for a walk or doing some gardening can help. Try to find something you enjoy and that you want to do.
Try to do things even if you don’t feel like it. Feeling lonely or depressed can make you less motivated and less likely to do things, which can make you more lonely and depressed. It’s important to break the cycle – try to do something you enjoy such as going for a walk or seeing friends, even if it’s just for a little while.

There are helplines that you can call for help and advice – Alzheimer’s Society’s **Dementia Helpline** is available on **0300 222 1122**.

If you are finding everything too much, try talking to a professional. Your GP may be able to help, or refer you to a specialist for ‘talking therapy’ – where you talk about how you’re feeling to a professional such as a psychologist or counsellor.

**Staying active**

Continuing to do the things you enjoy and keeping your mind active is very important when you have dementia. It can help you to stay confident, and help you to keep the skills and abilities you have for longer. It can also help you to stay independent.

It can sometimes feel more difficult to do things when you live alone – you may find it harder to keep track of when things are happening, or to get from place to place. Dementia shouldn’t stop you doing the things you want to, but you may have to change the way you do them.
■ Don’t be afraid to try new things – many local venues (such as the leisure centre, cinema, football club or library) offer activities for people living with dementia.

■ There are lots of opportunities to get involved in the community. This could be at the local leisure centre, place of worship, village hall, theatre or museum.

■ Transport can be difficult when you live alone, particularly if you live in a rural area. If you are finding it hard to get around, think about asking a friend or family member to take you, or see if a neighbour could give you a lift if they are going to the shops. If you don’t have someone who can take you, think about local transport schemes such as community transport or dial-a-ride. For more information contact your local Age UK or local authority.

■ Some people find ‘helpcards’ useful when they are out and about. These are cards that explain you have dementia and that you might need more time or support. Alzheimer’s Society produces free helpcards you can order – go to alzheimers.org.uk/publications or call 0300 303 5933.

■ You might find that technology can help you to stay independent and feel more confident when going out and about. There are lots of different types of technology available – for example, GPS devices in case you get lost. Speaking to an occupational therapist can help you find technology that could work for you.

For more information see Alzheimer’s Society factsheet 437, Using technology to help with everyday life, or booklet 1506, Keeping active and involved.

For advice and support call the Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
Dementia-friendly communities

Your local community might be very important to you. You might rely on people in the community who know you to help you out.

Some communities are becoming ‘dementia-friendly’. This means that:

- people in the area understand what dementia is and how it affects you
- banks, shops or post offices try to make it easier for people with dementia to use their services
- transport and signs are made easier and more accessible
- some places do special events for people with dementia such as dementia-friendly film screenings at the local cinema, swimming sessions at the local pool or reminiscence workshops at the local community centre or art gallery.

These things can make a big difference to people who live alone. Ask your local Alzheimer’s Society or Age UK what is happening in your community.

You could even try to help make your community more dementia friendly. Speak to your local Alzheimer’s Society. If you live in England, you may also have a local Dementia Action Alliance. They support communities and organisations to take action to help people live well with dementia. For details see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 28.
Managing at home

Everyday tasks

Dementia makes everyday tasks more difficult, especially as it progresses. You may also have other conditions that make things harder, such as hearing loss or problems with your sight, or both. If you live alone, you may have to develop particular ways of remembering to take your medication or leave out the bins. Or you may need to develop ways of managing everyday tasks around the home, such as cooking, cleaning or washing.

There are lots of things you can do to help make everyday activities manageable. Some are as simple as using a calendar. There is also technology (known as ‘assistive technology’) that can help.

- If you have memory problems, a diary or calendar can help you remember appointments, tasks and visits. Computers and smartphones also have apps you can use to set reminders.

- Try keeping to a regular routine and doing the most difficult things early in the day (or at the time of day you feel at your best).

- If you forget to take medication, dosette boxes (a box with separate compartments for days of the week and times of day) or automatic pill dispensers can help. Speak to your pharmacist or GP.

- If you find it hard to cook, you could have meals delivered to you (known as ‘meals on wheels’) or choose ready meals that are easy to cook. Some people also find online shopping helps, or having someone come in and help with preparing meals.
Living with dementia: Living alone

- Put a note by the door to remind you to lock up at night, or to remember your keys and wallet when you go out. You can get technology to help with this, such as a device that plays a recorded reminder when you open the front door.

- Put labels and pictures on cupboards to remind you where things are. You could keep frequently used items – cups, plates, or cutlery – on the side.

- You can get ‘locator devices’ that help you find things you’ve misplaced. You attach a small tile to the object, and if you misplace it you can push a button that makes the tile beep.

- If you have a smartphone, tablet or computer there are apps that can help, such as calendars. You can also programme important numbers into a phone so they’re easy to call.

If you think equipment or adaptations might help, talk to an occupational therapist. Social services or your GP can refer you to one.

‘A diary is a great idea. I use post it notes too, to remind me of what I need to do. That way there’s more chance of me actually doing them. I stick them on the wall at the foot of my bed so when I wake up I can see them. Doesn’t always work but it helps a bit.’

Person living with dementia
Staying safe and independent at home

There are lots of ways you can make your home ‘dementia friendly’. This means that it is set up to help you stay independent, physically active and safe.

This is more important when you live alone. You may not have someone around who can help you if something goes wrong, or you may forget to do things, such as turning the gas off. By making some of the small changes listed below you will be able to stay independent and living alone for longer.

You might not feel that you need to do all of these things now, but it can be a good idea to put things in place before you need them.

■ Have carbon-monoxide and smoke detectors fitted. Contact your local fire service to arrange a free home fire safety check.

■ Simple things like improving lighting, removing any trip hazards (for example loose rugs) and clutter and unused items can make your home safer.

■ Leave a light on in the bathroom at night. Night lights or lights connected to motion sensor that come on when you move about may help.

■ Register with MedicAlert® and Message in a Bottle so that your wishes are known in an emergency. (See ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 28 for details.)

■ Leave a set of house keys with a neighbour you trust or install a key safe (a safe on the outside of your house that can only be accessed by entering the correct code).
Keep a list of emergency telephone numbers by the phone. You could also save them on your phone to make it easier.

Think about technology that could help you. For example, there are ‘shut-off’ devices that turn off the gas or electricity after a set amount of time. You can also get alarms that you wear as pendants or bracelets that you can set off if you become worried or have a fall.

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 if things go wrong. For example, sensors can detect if you fall.

An occupational therapist can assist if you think equipment or adaptations might help. Your local authority social services team can help with accessing occupational therapy. Alternatively, your GP can refer you.

For more on this topic see booklets 1502, Keeping safe at home, and 819, Making your home dementia friendly.

‘If you move people, it can cause disorientation, but if you can make their home a safe environment, they can hold onto their memories. It’s so much better for their quality of life.’

Homecare worker
Money and financial issues

Managing money can become more difficult when you have dementia. If you live alone, there may be some extra things for you to think about.

It may be harder for you to get to the bank, for example. You might also need to think of ways to remember to pay bills or get to the post office.

You might also be more vulnerable to scams and tricks if you live alone, so it’s important to know the dangers and make sure you keep yourself protected.

- You could work out how much money you need each week and put a routine in place to withdraw it on the same day. You could put different amounts in individual envelopes for different things – for example, money for shopping in one, money for the newspaper in another.

- Set up direct debits for your regular bills such as gas, electricity and council tax. This means you won’t need to remember to pay a bill each time.

- Think about online or phone banking if you find it hard to get to your local branch.

- Be aware of scams and cold callers. Never give your bank details to anyone.

For advice and support call the Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
Stop unwanted junk mail and telephone calls by registering with the Mail Preference Service and Telephone Preference Service (see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 28).

You could put a ‘no cold callers’ sign on your front door. You may be able to get one from your local authority.

If you are unsure about someone (such as a workman or salesman) ask for their identification. If you still feel unsure ask them to come back when you have someone with you. You can also ring the company to check who they are and if they are meant to be in your area that day.

For more information see booklet 1501, Managing your money.

‘Doing something else at the same time as a Skype call helps, for example sitting down and having a cup of tea together, commenting on a jigsaw.’

Daughter of a person living with dementia
Planning for the future

When you have a diagnosis of dementia, it is important to plan for the future. This could be the type of care you want, or where you want to live if you can no longer live alone. This can be more important when you live alone because you may not have someone who knows what you want and what your preferences are.

You may want to start thinking about what your wishes are and recording them, when you feel ready. Think especially about who you can share this information with. You might want to think about:

- **Lasting power of attorney (LPA) and Enduring power of attorney (EPA)** – these give someone you choose the power to make decisions on your behalf, if you can no longer make them yourself. You can have an LPA for health and welfare (which covers decisions about care and treatment, including where you live) or for property and affairs (which covers decisions about finances and selling a house on your behalf) or both. In Northern Ireland, the EPA system only covers property and financial affairs.

- **Advance decision (or advance directive in Northern Ireland)** – this records your decisions about future medical care. It is a legal document that allows you to refuse, in advance, specific medical treatments or procedures – for example, whether to be resuscitated if your heart stops. It can’t be used to refuse basic care.
Advance statement – this records your likes and dislikes, and your priorities and preferences for the future. For example, where you would like to be cared for or day-to-day things you like to do, such as having a bath instead of a shower. It is not legally binding, but can help people to know what you want if you cannot decide these things for yourself.

For more information on planning for the future see booklet 1510, Planning ahead.

‘I think it’s entirely sensible to forward plan... I would start with making a will and granting an LPA.’

Person living with dementia
When you can no longer live alone

There may come a time when you need more support and are no longer able to manage at home on your own. It can be hard to know when this point has come.

You may struggle more than you used to with day-to-day tasks like cooking or washing, or you may not feel safe in your own home anymore. You may find it harder to get out and about and this may mean you feel increasingly isolated and lonely. If this is the case, it’s probably time to think about moving.

It might be hard to accept that you can no longer live alone. You may have done so for a long time, and you may be worried about losing your independence. It’s important that you’re honest with yourself. If you are struggling living on your own, or in your own home, you may want to move to somewhere you can get the support you need.

It can be a good idea to think about housing options before you need to move. This means that you will know what is available when the time comes. It might also feel less like a leap into the unknown if you have already thought about your options and found somewhere you would feel comfortable moving to.
You won’t necessarily have to move into a nursing or care home if you can no longer live alone. There are a range of housing options that you could consider. Some of these will give you more independence than others, depending on the amount of support you need.

- **Sheltered housing** – these are self-contained flats. They may have a warden and a 24-hour emergency alarm system, and some may have communal facilities. The level of support will vary depending on the scheme. Sheltered housing schemes usually expect residents to have a certain level of independence.

- **Extra care housing** – this is similar to sheltered accommodation but it provides extra support, such as assistance with personal care, meals, domestic support, and community activities.

- **Shared lives** – this is a scheme where someone who needs care and support moves in with, or is supported by, an approved Shared Lives carer.

- **Care homes** – these are either registered as residential care homes (providing support and assistance with personal care) or nursing homes (providing nursing care as well). The type of home that will be most suitable will depend on your needs.

It can help to talk to someone you trust about options and what you would like to happen in the future. For more information on housing options contact the Elderly Accommodation Counsel (see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 28).
Services and support

There are lots of organisations providing services for people with dementia. You might want to contact some local organisations to see if they have services you would find helpful.

Local groups including Alzheimer’s Society provide a range of services that you might find helpful. These could include information and support, peer support groups for people with dementia, activity groups, Singing for the Brain®, Side by Side and more.

Age UK runs a range of services for older people and people with dementia. These include help at home, benefits advice, handyman services and gardening services.

Your local authority provides information, advice and services. These will vary depending on where you live. For more information contact your local authority directly. You can find contact details in the phone book or on the GOV.UK website at www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council

Local homecare agencies offer a range of services from help with managing everyday jobs to personal care. For details of agencies in your area contact the UK Homecare Association (see ‘Other useful organisations’ on page 28) or your local authority.

There may be other local voluntary organisations that provide information or support where you live. For more details visit your library or contact your local authority.
Other useful organisations

**Age UK**  
0800 678 1602 (advice line, 8am–7pm every day)  
www.ageuk.org.uk

**Age Cymru**  
08000 223 444 (advice line, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri)  
www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru

**Age NI**  
0808 808 7575 (advice line, 8am–7pm every day)  
www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland

Aims to improve later life for everyone through information and advice, services, campaigns, products, training and research.

**Citizens Advice**  
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help people resolve problems with debt, benefits, employment, housing and discrimination.
Dementia Action Alliance
Various locations
www.dementiaaction.org.uk

An alliance of organisations across England that works to improve health and social care outcomes for people with dementia, including work on dementia-friendly communities.

Disabled Living Foundation
0300 999 0004
(helpline, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri)
info@dlf.org.uk
www.dlf.org.uk

National organisation providing practical advice and information on equipment and technology that can help people with dementia to live more independently.

Elderly Accommodation Counsel
0800 377 7070 (advice line, 9am–5pm weekdays)
info@firststopadvice.org.uk
www.eac.org.uk

Charity that aims to help older people make informed choices about their housing and care needs.
Mail Preference Service
www.mpsonline.org.uk

Provides a free online register to stop receiving unsolicited direct mail.

MedicAlert
01908 951045
info@medicalert.org.uk
www.medicalert.org.uk

Scheme that sells jewellery engraved with a code that links to a person’s medical records. It allows health professionals to get a person’s history in an emergency.

Message in a Bottle
lionsclubs.co/public

Message in a Bottle is a free scheme run by Lions Club International. They provide free bottles that you keep in your fridge with your medical information inside, in case of an emergency. For more contact your local Lions Club through the website.

The Silver Line
0800 4 70 80 90 (helpline, 24 hour)
info@thesilverline.org.uk
www.thesilverline.org.uk

Provides a 24-hour helpline for older people across the UK. Also provides telephone and letter friendship schemes.
Shared Lives Plus
0151 227 3499
info@sharedlivesplus.org.uk
sharedlivesplus.org.uk

A UK network of carers and support workers involved in lots of small projects to help adults across the country.

Telephone Preference Service
www.tpsonline.org.uk

Free service where you can record your preference not to receive unsolicited sales or marketing telephone calls.

UK Homecare Association
020 8661 8188
enquires@ukhca.co.uk
www.ukhca.co.uk

Professional association of homecare providers from the independent, voluntary, not-for-profit and statutory sectors.
Reviewed by: Emma Ouldred, Lead Dementia and Delirium Nurse, King’s College Hospital and Caroline Cottrell, Memory Service Practitioner, Haringey Memory Service.

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For advice and support call the Dementia Helpline on
0300 222 1 122
Alzheimer’s Society is the UK’s leading dementia charity. We provide information and support, improve care, fund research, and create lasting change for people affected by dementia.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer’s disease or any other form of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk or call the Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)