

## What is dementia?

Dementia is a range of symptoms that show that the brain has a disease. As this disease causes changes in the brain, it cannot work properly.

Only some people get dementia. It does not happen to everyone as they get older.

Most people with dementia have Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia. Fewer people with dementia have dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB) or frontotemporal dementia (FTD). There are other types of dementia that smaller numbers of people get.

Most people with dementia are over 65 years old. But younger people can also get dementia and this is called young-onset dementia.

## What are the symptoms of dementia?

A person with dementia may forget things. They may think, feel, speak and act differently. They can be confused. These changes can be small but they will get worse. How quickly this happens can be very different from person to person. After some time, the person will need more help to do the things they usually do.

**If you notice any changes and are worried about yourself or someone else, speak to your GP.**

**For support, call Alzheimer's Society on 0333 150 3456.**

## What causes dementia?

There are reasons why a person might be more likely to get dementia. These risks include getting older, certain genes, injury, aspects of health and lifestyle (for example, lack of physical activity, bad diet, alcohol and smoking).

There is lots of research looking into the brain and why dementia develops.

## Can a person get better from dementia?

There is no cure for dementia. A person can live well with dementia but cannot get better from it. Staying healthy and getting the right support can be helpful.

Some people with dementia need a lot of help. Others may not need help for a long time after they find out they have dementia. Dementia shortens how long a person will live for. However, people can live with it for many years.



Factsheet 400, **What is dementia?** has more information. To read it, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/what-is-dementia](https://alzheimers.org.uk/what-is-dementia). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# What are the signs and symptoms of dementia?

People with dementia do not always have the same symptoms. Different types of dementia can have different symptoms. Other people may see signs and changes that you don't notice. The early symptoms that many people with dementia get are described below.

**If you are worried about any changes in yourself or someone you are close to, see your GP. For support, call Alzheimer's Society on 0333 150 3456.**

## Memory loss

- You might have problems remembering things that happened recently. You might easily remember things from a long time ago.
- You might repeat things out loud. You might ask the same question over and over.

## Difficulty thinking things through and planning

- You might have problems concentrating, understanding new ideas or solving problems.
- You might find daily tasks difficult, like following a recipe or checking your bank account.

## Problems with language

- You might not be able to find the right word.
- You might not be able to follow a conversation.

## Being confused about time or place

- You might lose track of the time or date, or which day it is.
- You might not know where you are, even in a place you know well.

## Seeing things differently

- You might have problems judging distances (for example, on the stairs).
- You might see patterns or reflections in mirrors that look like something else.

## Mood changes or difficulties controlling emotions

- You might become more anxious, sad, frightened, irritable or easily upset.
- You might lose interest in things and lose confidence.
- Your personality may change.



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# What are non-drug treatments for dementia?

There is no cure for dementia yet. There are ways of treating some symptoms without using drugs. Looking after your health will help you to live well with dementia.

## Cognitive stimulation therapy (CST)

CST is a range of activities. These help to keep the brain active. You might do puzzles, talk about the news, or do something creative like singing.

## Cognitive rehabilitation

A professional will work with you to do something you're finding difficult. This gets parts of the brain that are working to help the parts that are not.

## Life story and reminiscence work

These treatments can improve your mood, wellbeing and memory. Life story work uses a scrapbook, photo album or app. You record and talk about important things from your life, to help remember them.

Reminiscence work uses photos, objects or music to talk about your past.

## Music and creative arts

Being creative can help. Making music, dancing and painting can keep the brain active. You might want to try an Alzheimer's Society Singing for the Brain® group. For more ideas see booklet 1506, **Keeping active and involved**.

## Complementary therapies

Aromatherapy, massage or bright light therapy can be used as well as other treatments. If you are interested in trying them, talk to your GP. Always make sure the therapist is properly trained.



Booklet 872, **The dementia guide: Living well after your diagnosis** has more information. To read it, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide](https://alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# What are drug treatments for dementia?

There is no cure for dementia yet. Some symptoms can be treated with drugs. Looking after the person's health will help them to live well with dementia.

## How do drugs help?

There are drugs that can help with some symptoms, or stop them getting worse for a while. They don't work for all types of dementia. They don't work for everyone. Some people may need to try different drugs to find one that works for them.

## Which drugs help with dementia?

Four drugs treat Alzheimer's disease. These are donepezil, rivastigmine, galantamine and memantine. These drugs may reduce the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease or stop them getting worse for a while. People with dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB), Parkinson's disease dementia or mixed dementia may also be given these drugs.

A person with frontotemporal dementia (FTD) won't be given these drugs. They may be given antidepressant drugs. A person with vascular dementia will usually be given drugs to treat other problems they have, such as high blood pressure or heart problems.

The GP will give the drugs to a person who needs them. They will check how the drugs are working every year at an annual review. For more information see factsheet 425, **How the GP can support a person with dementia**.

## Why take drugs to help with dementia?

Donepezil, rivastigmine, galantamine and memantine may help with the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and DLB for a while. They may make anxiety, memory and concentration better. The person might feel more motivated. Together these can help with everyday life.

Drugs given to a person with vascular dementia or FTD will help them to look after their health and live well with dementia.

## Do these drugs have side effects?

Talk to the GP about side effects. They affect only around one person in 10, on average. If one of the drugs causes side effects, the doctor might ask the person to try another.



Factsheet 407, **Drug treatments for Alzheimer's disease** has more information. To read it, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/drug-treatments](https://alzheimers.org.uk/drug-treatments). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# How can a person with dementia get support?

When you have dementia, it helps to find the right support. This will help you to live well.

**Social services and the needs assessment** – A person with dementia must have a needs assessment if they ask for one. Social services can give you advice about support and care. See factsheets, **Assessment for care in England** (418), **in Wales** (W418), and **in Northern Ireland** (NI418).

**Friends and family** – It can be hard to ask for or accept help. Friends and family can give great support. Meeting and talking can help with skills and living well. Try Zoom or a video call if you can't meet in person. See booklet 1507, **Your relationships**.

**Benefits and employment** – If you are working, you should talk to your employer. If you have stopped working, you may get a pension and benefits. See booklet 1509, **Employment** and factsheet 413, **Benefits for people affected by dementia**.

**Memory aids, strategies and technology** – Lots of people with dementia have memory problems. There are practical ways to cope with everyday living. See booklet 1540, **The memory handbook**.

**Support groups** – Some support groups have video calls to catch up with other people with dementia. Some are online, like Alzheimer's Society's Talking Point. See below for details.

**Support workers and dementia advisers** – Trained advisers from different organisations can help. They give practical, clinical and emotional support. They can help families too. Call Alzheimer's Society to speak to a trained dementia adviser on **0333 150 3456**.

**Support in the community** – Many places of worship and community centres offer dementia friendly services and support. These might be day centres, or dementia cafes. Go to **alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory** to find support in your area.

**Staying healthy and active** – Having dementia doesn't mean you should feel ill. Try to eat a balanced diet and stay active and involved. See booklet 1506, **Keeping active and involved**.

**Making your home dementia friendly** – Making your home safer and easier may mean you can live without help for longer. See booklet 819, **Making your home dementia friendly**.



Booklet 872, **The dementia guide: Living well after your diagnosis** has more information. To read it, go to **alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide**. For more information about our helpsheets, go to **alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets**



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# How can a person with dementia plan ahead?

Planning ahead means sorting out things like money, wills and powers of attorney. It can make you feel better to plan ahead. It can make things easier in the future. Put paperwork in a safe place. Speak to someone you trust to help you. This person should know where your paperwork is.

**Social services and the needs assessment** – A person with dementia must have a needs assessment if they ask for one. Social services can give you advice about support and care. See factsheets **Assessment for care in England** (418), **in Wales** (W418), and **in Northern Ireland** (NI418).

**Money** – Banks can give you a ‘chip and signature’ or contactless card, if remembering a PIN every time is hard. Someone you trust can do your banking for you. See booklet 1501, **Managing your money**.

**Benefits** – Some people with dementia can get benefits such as Attendance allowance or Personal independence payment. See factsheet 413, **Benefits for people affected by dementia**.

**Legal matters** – Make sure your will is up to date. You can set up an **advance decision** to refuse treatment, or make an **advance statement**. These let you have a say in your future medical care.

You can also set up a **Lasting power of attorney** (LPA) in England and Wales. It’s called an EPA in Northern Ireland. This means a person can make decisions on your behalf if you’re no longer able to.

There are two types:

- **Health and welfare LPA** – for decisions about day-to-day care and medical treatment. It can also cover decisions about where you live.
- **Property and affairs LPA** – this attorney can pay bills, collect income and benefits. They can access bank accounts and sell your home on your behalf, if needed.

For more information see factsheet 472, **Lasting power of attorney**. Alzheimer’s Society offers a free service to fill out LPA forms if you don’t have access to the internet, or don’t feel able to complete the forms online. For information call **0333 150 3456**.

**Driving** – You may not have to stop driving right away. Eventually dementia will stop you driving safely. You must tell DVLA in Great Britain or DVA in Northern Ireland about your dementia. Your car insurer must also be told. Go to gov.uk to apply for a blue badge parking permit for you or your carer.

**Working** – You may be able to carry on working. Talk to your employer. If you stop working or work less hours, you may be able to claim Employment and support allowance and Universal credit.



For more information on planning ahead, employment, managing your money and driving, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/plan-ahead](https://alzheimers.org.uk/plan-ahead). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# How can a person with dementia cope with memory loss?

Having dementia doesn't mean you need to stop doing the things you enjoy. Memory problems can make things more difficult.

These problems might be:

- forgetting people's names
- struggling to remember day-to-day events or experiences
- losing items (such as keys or glasses)
- getting lost in a familiar place or on a familiar journey
- finding it hard to start or follow conversations
- forgetting appointments or important dates (such as birthdays)
- struggling with the steps in a recipe.

## Tips for coping with memory loss

Everyone feels differently about memory problems. You might get frustrated or worried, or lose confidence.

These tips might make things easier:

- Put a regular routine in place – do things at the same time each day or week.
- Keep things straightforward – simple routines or daily tasks are easier.
- Focus on one thing at a time – try to break each task down into small steps.
- Take things at a slower pace if needed.
- Put out things before starting – tools for gardening or ingredients for cooking.
- Reduce distractions, such as background noise.
- Talk to friends, family or other people with memory problems. They might have some helpful ideas.
- Work on any memory problems that happen more often.
- Focus on the things you can remember and can do. There will still be many things you are able to do, that you learned in the past.
- If you've enjoyed doing something at home or been out for the day, talk about it afterwards. This helps you to remember it and feel positive about what you've done that day.



Booklet 1540, **The memory handbook** has more information and practical tips. To read it, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/memoryhandbook](https://alzheimers.org.uk/memoryhandbook). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# How can a person with dementia stay healthy and active?

Having dementia doesn't mean you should feel ill or low. You should see the doctor if you're feeling unwell. Being ill can make dementia worse. Being active can help you to stay independent and keep in touch with other people.

You may want to try something new. Or keep doing activities that you like. Ways to stay healthy and active include:

- eating balanced meals and drinking plenty of fluids
- drinking less alcohol, or not drinking alcohol at all
- stopping smoking
- swimming, walking, cycling, or gentle stretching
- keeping warm at home and when outside
- getting enough sleep
- seeing the GP if you are feeling low. This could be depression
- getting regular hearing tests. If you need one, wear your hearing aid. Check the batteries and keep it clean
- having regular eye tests. If you need them, clean your glasses. Check they are the right ones, such as reading glasses
- seeing the dentist regularly. Look after your mouth and teeth
- looking after your feet. Make sure shoes and slippers fit well
- asking the GP about vaccines. Ask about flu, pneumonia, coronavirus and shingles
- playing games or cards. You might enjoy word, number or jigsaw puzzles
- visiting your place of worship. Activities there might include praying, singing songs or hymns. You might make offerings or share a meal. Or take part in reading or meditating
- creating a scrapbook or photo album, or reading
- gardening and bird watching. You might be able to get out for a walk or some fresh air
- listening to the radio, podcasts, music or audiobooks
- being creative. Try knitting, painting, singing, dancing, writing or poetry
- seeing friends and family, going on trips
- spending time with a pet.



Booklet 1506, **Keeping active and involved** has more information. To read it, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/active-and-involved](https://alzheimers.org.uk/active-and-involved). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# How can a carer communicate with a person with dementia?

Communicating together can become more difficult over time, as the person's dementia gets worse.

They may:

- struggle to find the right word
- repeat things out loud
- not understand what others are saying
- get confused about words and what they mean.

This can be very frustrating for both of you. Many carers find it hard to stay calm. Don't be too hard on yourself if this happens. You might need to take a break.

There are lots of ways to communicate clearly and calmly, together:

- Get the person's full attention before you start. The room should be quiet. For example, turn off the TV or radio.
- Make sure you are where you see and hear each other as clearly as possible.
- Keep hearing aids and glasses clean. Keep prescriptions up to date.
- Listen carefully. Repeat what is said if the person does not understand.
- Go at a slightly slower pace than usual if the person can't follow you. Use short, simple sentences.
- Don't talk to the person as you would to a child – be patient and have respect for them. Do not speak to others as though the person is not there.
- Try to make sure your body language is open and relaxed.
- Try to avoid speaking sharply or raising your voice. If you become frustrated, leave the room until you feel calmer.
- Sometimes there is a language barrier. An interpreter, translation or app on a smartphone or tablet can help.
- Allow the person plenty of time to respond – it may take them longer to work out their response.
- Try not to interrupt the person – even to help them find a word – as it can break the pattern of communication.
- Use physical contact to show the person you care. Don't underestimate the reassurance you can give by holding the person's hand or putting your arm around them, if it feels appropriate.



Factsheet 500, **Communicating** has more information. To read it, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/communicating](https://alzheimers.org.uk/communicating). For more information about our helpsheets, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets](https://alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets)



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# How can a carer for a person with dementia get support?

When you're caring for a person with dementia it can help you to find the right support. This will help you to live well.

When things feel difficult, it's a good idea to take a break. Getting some fresh air, reading, or taking time to enjoy a tea or coffee can help. Keeping in touch with other people is an important part of living well while caring.

**Social services and the carer's assessment** – A carer must get their own needs assessment if they ask for one. Social services can give advice about support. See factsheets **Assessment for care in England** (418), **in Wales** (W418), and **in Northern Ireland** (NI418).

**Friends and family** – It can be hard to ask for or accept help. But it can take the pressure off carers a little to have help from friends and family. You can stay in touch with video calls, like Zoom.

**Benefits and employment** – If you are working, you should talk to your employer. If you have stopped working, you may get a pension and benefits. See factsheet 413, **Benefits for people affected by dementia**.

**Support groups** – Local groups bring carers together. Some are online, like Alzheimer's Society's Talking Point. See below for details. You might join a virtual group to talk with others.

**Support workers and dementia advisers** – Trained advisers from different organisations can help. They give practical, clinical and emotional support. They can help families too. Call Alzheimer's Society to speak to a trained dementia adviser on **0333 150 3456**.

**Support in the community** – Many places of worship and community centres offer dementia friendly services and support. These might be day centres, or dementia cafes. Go to **alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirctory** to find support in your area.

**Respite care and breaks** – Respite care is when someone else cares for the person with dementia. This can give you a short break. See factsheets **Replacement care (respite care) in England** (462), **in Wales** (W462), and **in Northern Ireland** (NI462).



Booklet 600, **Caring for a person with dementia:**

**A practical guide** has more information. To read it, go to **alzheimers.org.uk/carersguide**. For more information about our helpsheets, go to **alzheimers.org.uk/helpsheets**



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