

Simple ways to help someone living with dementia



Leading the fight
against dementia

Alzheimer's
Society

Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain such as Alzheimer's. It can happen to anyone and there is currently no cure. But the more support you can give someone, the better life with dementia can be, especially in the early years.

This booklet provides some useful background information about dementia, advice on what to expect and some practical tips on how to help.

Photo Credits

Thank you to the people featured in this leaflet, who are all living with dementia.

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What is dementia?

Dementia is not a single illness. It is a group of symptoms caused by specific brain disorders. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease, but dementia can also be the result of a stroke or mini-strokes.

The main symptoms are:

- **loss of memory** – such as forgetting the way home from the shops, forgetting names or places, or being unable to remember what happened earlier in the day
- **mood changes** – because of damage to parts of the brain that control emotions, people can become frightened, angry or sad more easily
- **communication problems** – a decline in the ability to talk, read and write

Dementia is progressive – the symptoms will get worse over time. Although there is no cure, treatments can slow the progression of the disease, and there are ways of helping to keep it manageable.

Understanding dementia

Dementia currently affects more than 570,000 people in England. It mainly affects older people, although about 12,500 people under 65 have some form of dementia. Both men and women are affected.

Becoming forgetful does not necessarily mean that someone has dementia: memory loss can be a normal part of ageing, and it can also be a sign of stress or depression. If you know someone who is worried about their memory, encourage them to visit their GP.

A proper diagnosis of dementia is essential. The doctor – either a GP or a specialist – will carry out a number of tests, looking at both memory and the ability to perform daily tasks. The doctor will also aim to rule out any illnesses that might have similar symptoms to dementia, including depression. The right diagnosis, whatever it may be, can help patients and those close to them prepare and plan for the future.

Five simple ways to help someone living with dementia

1 Respect and dignity

Focus on what the person can do, not what they can't.

2 Be a good listener and be friendly

Support and accept the person, be patient.

3 Do one little thing

Cook a meal or run an errand, it all helps.

4 Make time for everyone

Partners, children and grandchildren will be affected.
Could you do something to help one of them?

5 Find out more

Understanding dementia makes living with it easier.

Practical tips

Especially in the early stages, there are lots of simple things you can do to help someone with dementia maintain their independence.

- encourage them to keep a notebook or diary for things such as appointments, To Do lists, thoughts and ideas
- keep important things like money, glasses and keys in the same place
- put labels on doors and cupboards
- place important numbers by the phone where they can be seen easily
- put a note on the back of the door as a reminder to take keys
- label family photographs, both on display and in albums
- pin a weekly timetable to the wall
- mark a calendar with the date or get an electronic calendar that changes automatically
- write reminders to lock the door at night, turn the gas off and put the rubbish out on a certain day

There are products you can buy which are designed to help with memory problems – telephones where buttons are replaced with photos of people, and pill boxes with compartments for different days. An occupational therapist may be able to advise you on what things could be most useful (you can find an occupational therapist through your GP or social services).



Keeping active

People with dementia can continue to enjoy many activities, both individually and with others. Remaining physically and mentally active can help them focus on the positive and fun aspects of life.

Many beneficial activities can be simple everyday tasks, such as taking a walk, polishing a pair of shoes, listening to the radio or looking after a pet.

Think about ways of adapting favourite activities (for example, reading magazines and newspapers rather than books), to help the person avoid feeling frustrated that they can't tackle things they previously took for granted.

Keeping active can help the person feel better about themselves by providing a structure to the day and a sense of achievement.

Showing you understand

A diagnosis of dementia can cause different emotions, many of them difficult to manage both for the person with the illness and those around them. There may also be a sense of relief: now that they know what the problem is, they can begin to deal with it.

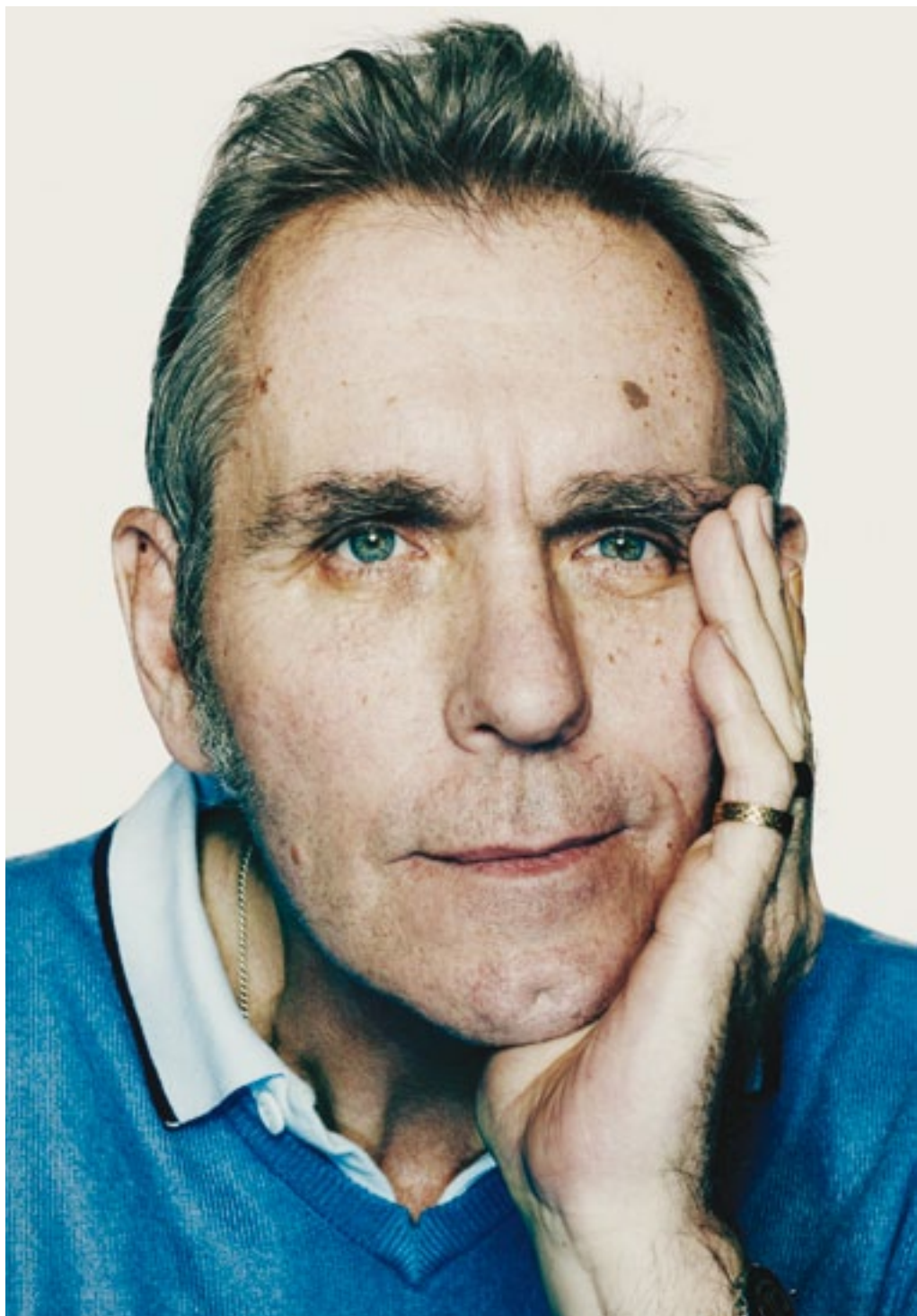
A person with dementia will probably be sad or upset at times. In the earlier stages, they may want to talk about their anxieties and the problems they are experiencing. Try to understand how they feel, and don't brush their worries aside. Listen, let them talk, and show that you are there for them.

When someone has dementia, they need:

- reassurance that they are still valued, and that their feelings matter
- freedom from as much external stress as possible
- appropriate activities and stimulation to help them to remain alert and motivated for as long as possible.

Many people who have dementia develop what appears to be unusual or inappropriate behaviour. Remember their actions may be perfectly rational to them. You may need to think about how their altered view of the world may lead to different ways of thinking and behaving.

A person with dementia is not being deliberately difficult: often their behaviour is an attempt to communicate. If you can establish what this is, you can resolve their concerns more quickly. Try to put yourself in their place and understand what they are trying to express and how they might be feeling.



Support services

It is worth thinking ahead about support available, so it will be easier to organise if needed in the future.

- Social services have a duty to assess the needs of people with dementia. Help may be in the form of home care assistants, laundry services, meals on wheels or nursing care
- Day care centres are often run by voluntary organisations such as Alzheimer's Society, or by social services. They can be a great source of support both to the person with dementia and those who are caring for them
- Respite care is short-term care used as a temporary alternative to someone's usual care. It gives the carer an essential break from looking after the person with dementia

Other sources of support include hospital care, sheltered housing and residential care. Your GP or social services will know what is available in your area.

Visit **www.direct.gov.uk** to find out how your local authority's social services department can provide support.

Other useful information and organisations

Alzheimer's Society

T 020 7423 3500

E info@alzheimers.org.uk

W alzheimers.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline

T 0845 300 0336

Monday to Friday

8.30am-6.30pm

Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline provides information and advice for people with dementia and their carers. BT landline calls to 0845 numbers cost no more than 4 pence per minute; calls made from mobiles usually cost more.

The Society provides help at a local level with some branches organising services, including day care. A monthly newsletter includes helpful hints on caring and finances, as well as news of research, meetings, local events and new initiatives in the care of people with dementia. The Society also publishes a variety of booklets and factsheets.

Age UK

T 020 8765 7200

E info@ageconcern.org.uk

W age.org.uk

Age UK (formerly Age Concern and Help the Aged) support all people over 50 in the UK, ensuring that they get the most from life. Age UK provides essential services such as day care and information. Local Age UK services provide a range of activities outside the home which bring people together and reduce isolation.

MIND (National Association for Mental Health)

T 020 8519 2122

0845 7660 163 MindinfoLine

Monday to Friday

9.00am-5.00pm

E contact@mind.org.uk

W mind.org.uk

MIND publishes some relevant booklets, and runs projects that may also be useful to people with dementia. The national information line can give details of local groups.

NHS Direct

T 0845 4647

W nhs.uk/nhsdirect

NHS Direct provides people in England with expert health information and advice over the phone or on the internet. Trained health and nurse advisors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for patients and carers, helping them to care for themselves or someone else at home or access appropriate health services.

Carers Direct

T 0808 802 0202

E CarersDirect@nhschoices.nhs.uk

W nhs.uk/CarersDirect

Carers Direct is part of NHS Choices. It offers free, confidential information and advice for carers by email or phone. Lines are open 8.00am-9.00pm Monday to Friday and 11.00am-4.00pm at weekends. Calls are free from UK landlines.

Dementia. The more we understand the more we can help.

For more information about supporting someone living with dementia, visit [nhs.uk/dementia](https://www.nhs.uk/dementia)

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