

Dementia Factsheet – A brief insight

This factsheet provides a brief overview of what Dementia is, the several types and some of the signs and symptoms. For further in-depth information and help, we suggest you explore the support services listed below.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe a set of symptoms that occur when the brain is affected by specific diseases and conditions. The symptoms can cause a loss of mental ability severe enough to interfere with normal activities of daily living. There are over 100 different types of dementia. Around 95% of people with a diagnosis will have one of the four main types:

1. Alzheimer's disease
2. Vascular dementia
3. Dementia with Lewy bodies
4. Frontotemporal dementia

Signs and Symptoms

Dementia affects people in different ways, particularly in the early stages of the disease. The various types of dementia, environment and the response from others, all have an impact on how a person's dementia will present. Dementia is progressive, with symptoms becoming more severe over time. In the latter stages, symptoms become more universal. Some of the most common symptoms and behaviour are:

- memory loss - problems recalling things that happened recently (although some people easily remember things from a long time ago)
- concentrating – difficulties grasping new ideas, solving problems, planning or organising
- impaired cognitive functioning– difficulties carrying out a sequence of tasks (such as making a cup of tea)
- difficulties following and engaging in conversations
- repeating themselves - asking the same question over and over
- problems judging distances, misinterpreting patterns and/or seeing objects in three dimensions
- losing track of time – day, month and season
- become confused around their surroundings - not knowing where they are, even in a place they know well
- visual hallucinations and delusions
- changes in mood – become irritable, withdrawn, anxious, upset, unusually sad, angry and in some cases aggressive
- physical symptoms – particularly in the latter stages, a person may suffer muscle and weight loss and become physically frail

A person with mild dementia is usually someone who is still generally capable of looking after themselves, even if they have people coming to give them help from time to time with certain things. In direct contrast, someone with severe dementia is no longer capable of looking after themselves and will probably require full-time care.

Alzheimer's Disease

The condition most commonly associated with dementia is Alzheimer's disease. It is a degenerative disease that affects the brain. It is important to remember, that while anyone who has Alzheimer's

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can be said to have dementia, the opposite does not apply - not everyone who has dementia has Alzheimer's disease. An early sign of Alzheimer's is mild memory loss. A person may mislay things or forget people's names. Other signs may include: problems with language, feeling confused, difficulties problems solving and struggling with decision making.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia occurs when there is a lack of oxygen to the brain which damages or destroys brain cells. This is caused through the narrowing or blockage of blood vessels. There are several types of vascular dementia with one cause being stroke related illness, either through a large stroke or a series of smaller strokes over a period of time. If a person has a large stroke which causes dementia, then the symptoms will be evident straightaway. In other cases, signs may include: short periods of confusion, difficulties with problem-solving, planning and concentration.

Frontotemporal Dementia

Frontotemporal dementia is where the front and side areas of the brain become damaged. These are the areas that deal with a person's language, behaviour and emotions. There are 3 different types of Frontotemporal dementia and each can produce different symptoms. The types are:

- behavioural variant
- semantic dementia
- progressive non-fluent aphasia

Symptoms of Frontotemporal dementia include: obsessive and compulsive behaviour, changes in personality including becoming insensitive to others and making socially inappropriate remarks (behavioural variant frontotemporal dementia); losing the meaning or understanding of words (semantic dementia); losing fluency of speech (progressive non-fluent aphasia). Whereas Alzheimer's Disease and Vascular Dementia are often associated with older people, Frontotemporal dementia can affect much younger people – 40 to 60 age range.

Dementia with Lewy bodies

The cause of this dementia is tiny abnormal structures called Lewy bodies that develop inside brain cells and disrupt the way the brain operates. Symptoms may include: problem solving and difficulties with planning, judging distance, difficulty with movement, disturbed sleep and hallucinations. Lewy bodies are also found in people with Parkinson's Disease. A third of people with Parkinson's disease will go onto develop Parkinson's Disease Dementia.

Mixed Dementia

It is possible for someone to have more than one form of dementia. It is estimated that 10% of people with dementia will have more than one type. The most common combination is Alzheimer's and Vascular Dementia.

Other causes of Dementia

A wide range of other conditions can lead to dementia. These are rare, and together account for only about 5% of all people with dementia. However, they are more common in people under the age of 65. Examples of other diseases where dementia symptoms may be prominent are:

- Parkinson's Disease Dementia
- Huntington's Disease
- Hydrocephalus (Fluid on the brain)

- Korsakoff's Syndrome and other alcohol related dementia
- Niemann-Pick disease type C
- Following brain injury or a brain tumour
- HIV-related cognitive impairment
- Corticobasal degeneration
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD)
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Progressive Supranuclear Palsy

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

MCI is not dementia. It is where some people experience problems with their memory but not to the extent that it affects everyday life. Whilst people diagnosed with MCI are at greater risk of developing dementia, it can also be associated with other illnesses, such as anxiety or depression both of which can be treated.

Further dementia reading and support.

Age UK - UK's largest charity for older people. Provides information and support on a wide range of topics, including a bespoke page on Dementia.

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/conditions-illnesses/dementia/help-and-support/>

Alzheimer Scotland – charity that works to improve the quality of life of people affected by dementia in Scotland.

<http://www.alzscot.org/>

24-hour Dementia helpline – 0808 808 3000

Alzheimer's Research UK – the world's leading dementia research charity dedicated to causes, diagnosis, prevention, treatment and cure.

<http://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/>

Alzheimer's Society - The UK's leading dementia support and research charity in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Has a specific section for **professionals**.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk>

National Dementia Helpline: 0300 222 11 22

DEEP (The Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project) – a site that brings together and supports groups of people with dementia from across the UK, with the aim of trying to change services and policies that affect the lives of people with dementia

<http://dementiavoices.org.uk>

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Dementia – A site managed by a pharmaceutical company that provides people with dementia, their carers and family members with helpful resources and information.

<http://www.dementia.com/>

Join Dementia Research - A Department of Health funded site and delivered in partnership with The National Institute of Health Research, Alzheimer Scotland, Alzheimer's Research UK and Alzheimer's Society in a service that allows people to register their interest in participating in dementia research and be matched to suitable studies. It invites people who have a dementia diagnosis and those who do not have any memory problems to register.

www.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk

The Dementia Research Centre - is a hub for clinical research into various forms of dementia. The hub's work focuses on identifying and understanding the disease processes that cause dementia, the factors that influence those processes, and how best to support people with dementia and their families.

<http://www.dementia.ion.ucl.ac.uk/>

Dementia UK – whilst this charity site specifically deals with providing specialist dementia support for families through Admiral Nurse Service, it also provides resources and information on dementia.

www.dementiauk.org

Missing People – The UK's charity for missing people. Dedicated to bringing missing children and adults back together with their families. The charity offers free, confidential advice and emotional support to family members when someone is missing. They also work alongside the police and other organisations to help find missing people.

<https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/>

24-hour helpline – 116 000

NHS – dementia advice page. Signposts to other resources and support such as charities and Admiral Nurses.

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/dementia-guide/pages/dementia-help-and-support.aspx

UK Missing Person Bureau – the National Crime Agency's UK Missing Persons Bureau is the UK national and international point of contact for all missing person and unidentified body investigations. They provide support and advice to police forces in order to resolve cases and act as a hub for the exchange of information and expertise in this area. They also provide a factsheet on people with dementia who are reported missing.

<http://missingpersons.police.uk/en-gb/home>