

## South Gloucestershire Dementia Action Alliance

To find out more about our work, or to get involved contact us today.

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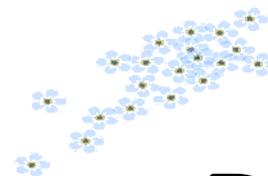
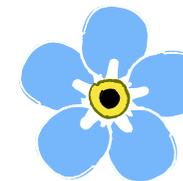
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**South Gloucestershire**  
Dementia Action Alliance  
A friendlier community for all



# Dementia

## An introduction

*This pamphlet was made using information from Alzheimer's Disease International, Alzheimer's Society, NHS Whittington, and Torbay Dementia Action alliance*



## What is dementia?

Dementia is a challenging disease. Our rapidly aging population, and the fact that one in fourteen people over 65 years have dementia, means dementia is our biggest health and social care challenge today. However, with the right help and support, people with dementia should be able to live actively in their community.

There are many forms of dementia, but they are caused by diseases of the brain which can cause:

- Problems with memory
- Problems with everyday tasks, like handling money.
- Problems with communication
- Problems with perception

It is progressive, meaning it starts off with very mild symptoms and gets worse over time. This means that, with the right support and understanding, people can live relatively normal lives for many years. We shouldn't make assumptions about people with dementia, as it affects everyone differently. At present, there is no cure, although there are some treatments for some dementias.

## What causes Dementia?

The risk factors for dementia are:

- Lack of exercise
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Poor diet
- Depressions
- Obesity
- Alcohol abuse
- High cholesterol

Dementia is an umbrella term for a over 100 diseases and conditions. The most common are below:

**Alzheimer's Disease**, - the most common cause of dementia. Problems

of short-term memory are usually the first noticeable sign.

**Vascular Dementia** – this can occur either suddenly, following a stroke, or over time through a series of small strokes.

**Dementia with Lewy Bodies** –Initial symptoms can include disorientation and hallucinations. This form of dementia is similar to Parkinson's Disease.

**Fronto-temporal dementia (including Pick's Disease)** Personality and behaviour changes are the most obvious initial signs.

## Caring for someone with dementia

If someone close to you has been diagnosed with dementia, it's important not to underestimate the impact this may have on you, and your relationship. Many people find that they have taken on the role of a 'carer' without making any decision to do so. It can be stressful and at times upsetting. It can also be very rewarding. It's important that you look after your own health and wellbeing, and turn to others for support when you need it.

### Emotional Support

When you're caring for someone with dementia, you're likely to experience a wide range of emotions at different times. Try and take time to reflect on how you're feeling, and talk to someone you trust. You might choose a professional, a friend or family member, or someone at a carers' support group.

### Practical Support

Caring for a person with dementia can become gradually more demanding, physically and emotionally. Getting support will make it easier for you to cope and better for the person you care for.

There are many sources of support, including:

- Family members and friends— help, even for an hour, can be invaluable.
- Benefits & your employer—you may be able to work flexibly, or be entitled to benefits.
- South Glos Council—you are entitled to have your needs assessed, as a carer.
- Support workers from voluntary organisations like Alzheimer's Society.
- Support groups—carers support groups, or memory cafes can give you a chance to talk to others who understand.

### Your health & wellbeing

You need to prioritise your own health and wellbeing. Visit your GP regularly, and make sure you take time for yourself.

## For more information & support

**[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)**, call 0300 22 11 22 for information, and 0117 961 0693 for local support around all types of dementia.

**[www.carerssupportcentre.org.uk](http://www.carerssupportcentre.org.uk)**, 0117 939 2562—local support, information and advice.

## Five ways to help people with dementia

1. **Treat them with respect** We need to address any stigma about dementia that comes from a misunderstanding of the disease. A person with dementia is still the same person— a unique and valuable human being. Focus on what the person can do, not what they can't.
2. **Stay in touch.** Don't lose contact with someone because of the disease. People with dementia want to maintain their old life as much as possible, and still have a lot to offer. Support and accept them. Even if they don't remember you, you can still significantly brighten their day by visiting.
3. **Do something practical to help.** Cook a meal or run an errand, it helps them to feel supported and enables them to keep living independently for as long as possible.
4. **Make time for everyone.** Partners, children and grandchildren will be affected, and the caring role can often be very demanding, Could you do something to help one of them?
5. **Find out more**—the more we all understand, the less stigma there will be, and that makes living with it easier.

## South Gloucestershire Dementia Action Alliance

We are working to make South Gloucestershire a better place to live if you have dementia, or are caring for someone who does. We can support communities and organisations to make real change. Do you want to be involved?

- Get your organisation to sign up to SGDA and pledge action.
- Volunteer to help—there are many roles available, from running stalls, or working in the office, to raising money or running dementia awareness sessions.
- Set up a Local Action Group—we have resources to help you.
- Set up a support or social group in your area. We have resources to help you.
- Get together with others, and form a local action group to make real change, from raising awareness with your local shops, to improving the local built environment.
- Host a 'Dementia Friends' awareness session.

## Who does dementia affect?

There are around 3,200 people in South Gloucestershire with dementia. Dementia mainly affects people over the age of 65 and the prevalence increases with age. However, it can affect younger people: there are over 40,000 people in the UK under the age of 65 who have dementia.

Someone having dementia can also significantly impact the lives of their family members and friends. Family members often give up a lot in their own life to care for the person with dementia, and also need our support and understanding.

## Can dementia be cured?

There are currently no cures for dementia, although research is continuing into developing drugs, vaccines and other treatments. Drugs have been developed that can treat some of the symptoms of some types of dementia.

## What has this got to do with me?

Dementia will touch all our lives, and we can all make a difference! It is estimated that over 20 million people in the UK have a family member or friend with dementia. A third of people over 65 years old will get dementia.

Raising awareness and increasing understanding and support of people with dementia can make a huge difference to people's lives. Two thirds of people with dementia today still live in their community, and face many challenges going about their daily lives. These include going

shopping, using public transport, and socialising. When they face difficulties, it adds to their stress, and can lead to people reducing or giving up their community involvement and becoming isolated. Unfortunately people's lack of understanding and impatience can make these problems worse. We all need to start talking about dementia, and increasing our understanding.

We all have an important role to play in ensuring people living with dementia can continue to live their lives, socialise, and be an active part

## How to spot the signs of dementia

Every person is unique and the many different types of dementia affect people differently. However, diagnosis has many benefits so it is helpful to know the signs to look for.

### Memory loss

People with ordinary forgetfulness may briefly forget their next-door neighbour's name but they still know the person they are talking to is their next-door neighbour. A person with dementia may not only forget their neighbour's name but also the context.

### Difficulty performing familiar tasks

People with dementia often find it hard to complete everyday tasks that should be so familiar they would not usually have to think about how to do them.

### Problems with language

Occasionally everyone has trouble finding the right word but a person with dementia often forgets simple words or substitutes unusual words, making speech or writing hard to understand.

### Disorientation with time and place

Many people forget the day of the week or where we are going but people with dementia can become lost in familiar places such as the road they live in. A person with dementia may also confuse night and

day.

### Poor or decreased judgement

People with dementia may dress themselves inappropriately, wearing several layers of clothes on a warm day or very few on a cold day.

### Problems with keeping track of things

A person with dementia may find it difficult to follow a conversation or keep up with paying their bills.

### Misplacing things

A person with dementia may put things in unusual places such as an iron in the fridge or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl.

### Changes in mood or behaviour

A person with dementia may become unusually emotional and experience rapid mood swings for no apparent reason. Alternatively a person with dementia may show less emotion than was usual previously.

### Loss of initiative

A person with dementia may become very passive, sitting in front of the television for hours, sleeping a lot, or lose interest in hobbies.

## What to do if you are worried?

If you think that these problems are affecting your daily life, or the life of someone you know, you should talk to your doctor for diagnosis. You can also speak to the Alzheimer's Society dementia information and support team on 0117 961 0693.

## The benefits of diagnosis

*"I was diagnosed as having the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. While this was a terrible blow to both myself and my wife, we were glad to have been told so that we could discuss the possible effects on our lives and plan how we could adjust to the situation".* George Brown, UK.

Although being diagnosed with dementia can be upsetting, it can be a relief because knowing the causes of your problems can resolve the anxiety felt by both you and your family. It also allows you to plan and put in place important support as the disease progresses.

### Receiving an early diagnosis of dementia will enable you to:

- Gain access to information, resources and support
- Demystify and de-stigmatise your condition
- Maximise your quality of life
- Benefit from treatments
- Plan for the future
- Explain to your family, friends and colleagues what has changed in your life

### On a practical level there is a lot that can be done:

- You may wish to review your financial situation. This might include arranging for bills to be paid, or getting

a power of attorney.

- If you are still at work, you could think about reducing your hours or switching to another job.
- Learn about benefits that you might be entitled to, for example you may be entitled to a council tax reduction.
- Learn about what support services are available in your area.
- It is advisable to check with your insurance company to see whether you are still covered for driving.
- You may wish to participate in a support or social group, such as a memory café, to form new friendships to share feelings, information and coping strategies.