Dementia and the workplace

A guide for employers in Scotland
The Early Stage Dementia project at Age Scotland

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This information has been prepared by the Early Stage Dementia project, which is funded by the Life Changes Trust to support the charity in raising awareness of early stage dementia and promoting the impact healthy active ageing can have on reducing the risk of dementia.

This guide contains general advice only which we hope will be of use to you. Nothing in this guide should be construed as the giving of specific advice and should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. Age Scotland does not accept any liability arising from its use.

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Dementia

- Alzheimer's Disease: 62%
- Mixed dementia: 10%
- Vascular dementia: 17%
- Frontotemporal dementia: 4%
- Lewy bodies: 2%
**Introduction**

Dementia is the umbrella term for a group of illnesses that cause damage to the brain and its functions; including thinking, memory and communication. Around 90,000 people in Scotland today are living with dementia, and its incidence is rising steeply as the population ages.

**Dementia is a workplace issue.**

It is often thought of as something which affects people who have retired. However with state pension age rising and abolition of the default retirement age people will increasingly experience the first symptoms of dementia while at work. Also, many employees juggle work with caring for a family member or friend who has dementia.

Surveys show that people would often be reluctant to tell their employer if they were diagnosed with dementia. They are also far less likely to seek medical advice for problems with thinking, memory and communication than for physical symptoms. It is possible to live well, and work well, with dementia – but both employers and employees need to acknowledge the issue, and approach it in the right way, for that to happen.

This guide explains how dementia can affect the workplace and what employers can do to minimise the risk of dementia adversely affecting their workforce and business. It also sets out what they must and should do with regard to an employee who is living with dementia, or who is caring for someone with dementia.
Dementia is a workplace issue: the case in numbers

12%  
Proportion of people with dementia in the UK who are **UNDER AGE 70**

18%  
People under age 65 with dementia in the UK who **CONTINUE IN WORK** after receiving a diagnosis

93%  
**WORKING CARERS** in the UK who report that looking after someone with dementia has affected their **CAPACITY TO WORK**

£22.7BN  
Predicted spending power of households affected by dementia in the UK by 2030
Dementia and the workplace

19% Adults in Scotland who have given regular care to someone with dementia

39% People in Scotland who would not want their employer to know if they were diagnosed with dementia.

90,000 People in Scotland with dementia

Predicted increase in dementia in Scotland between 2011 & 2031 x2
Dementia and the workplace

Five facts workplaces should know about dementia

Memory loss is not always the first sign of dementia

There are around 100 types of dementia. Memory loss is a symptom common to the early stages of many. But with some the first signs are different, for example changes in behaviour.

- Compulsiveness
- Forgetfulness
- Losing thread
- Hard to plan or decide
- Misjudging depth and distance
- Appetite changes
- Alertness fluctuations
- Slower movement
- Apathy
- Poor balance
- Mood swings
- Less fluent speech
- Sleep problems

What looks like dementia may be something else

Early stage dementia has symptoms in common with other conditions, including stress and depression. Many causes of problems with memory, communication and thinking can be treated very effectively, and sometimes reversed.

- Depression
- Menopause
- Anxiety
- Stroke
- Medications
- Lack of sleep
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Epilepsy
- Dementia
- Head injury
- Stress related illness
- Infections
- Underactive thyroid
Dementia and the workplace

Dementia is not a natural part of ageing

As brains age there is inevitably some change in thinking abilities. Dementia is far more severe, gets progressively worse, and is ultimately terminal.

Diagnosing dementia can be a slow process

Other possible causes of symptoms need to be ruled out. Typically a GP will refer to specialists for further tests. It can take months, sometimes years, to confirm a diagnosis. The diagnosis rate in Scotland is estimated to be 65 percent.

A dementia diagnosis is worth getting

A timely diagnosis allows for early treatment and support that can enable someone to live well, and work well, with dementia: potentially for years to come. In Scotland there is an entitlement to at least one year of support after diagnosis coordinated by a dementia link worker or Community Psychiatric Nurse.

“[Getting a diagnosis] was a relief ... with all the ‘not remembering’ I knew there was something wrong.”

Myra, office manager
Dementia and the law

The main legislation that applies where dementia affects a workplace is the Equality Act 2010.

The Act sets out nine ‘protected characteristics.’ Unfairly discriminating against an employee on the basis of one or more of these is unlawful.

Disability is a protected characteristic. It is defined as a ‘physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on someone’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.’ Dementia matches the disability definition. Because it’s a progressive disability the Act treats it as having a substantial adverse affect as soon as it has some impact on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

There is no limit to compensation that can be claimed under the Act. It applies to organisations of every kind and every size.

The Act also protects against discrimination that takes place because of who someone thinks you are, or because of someone you’re associated with. So, for example, unfair discrimination against an employee because they are caring for someone with dementia will be unlawful.

Protection from discrimination extends to agency workers, casual workers, zero hours workers and, in some situations, self-employed workers. It doesn’t depend on the existence of a written contract. It applies so long as someone has agreed to personally do work for an employer in exchange for pay. Where one worker is discriminatory toward another because of a disability, the employer can be liable under the Act.
Dementia and the workplace

Under the Equality Act 2010 being unaware of an employee’s disability does not necessarily excuse an employer. A tribunal may take a view that they could have been reasonably expected to know, in which case they may be held liable for unfair discrimination.

- **TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION**
  - **DIRECT**: Where a person is treated differently and worse than someone else without justification.
  - **INDIRECT**: Where a practice, policy or rule is applied equally, but because someone has a protected characteristic it has a different, and worse, effect on them. However if an employer can prove there’s a good reason for the practice, policy or rule they will not be liable.
  - **ARING FROM DISABILITY**: Where someone is treated unfairly because of something connected to a disability, rather than the disability itself.
  - **HARASSMENT**: Where unwanted behaviour offends someone or makes them feel intimidated or humiliated.
  - **VICTIMISATION**: Where someone is treated badly because they complain about discrimination or help someone who has been discriminated against.

- **EQUALITY ACT 2010 PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS**
  - AGE   RACE   SEX   SEXUAL ORIENTATION
  - DISABILITY   RELIGION OR BELIEF
  - GENDER REASSIGNMENT   PREGNANCY OR NEW BABY
  - MARRIAGE OR CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

- **DID YOU KNOW?**

Under the Equality Act 2010 being unaware of an employee’s disability does not necessarily excuse an employer. A tribunal may take a view that they could have been reasonably expected to know, in which case they may be held liable for unfair discrimination.
Steps to make your organisation dementia ready

1. Foster an open and supportive working culture

So that should an employee experience problems with memory, thinking or communication, they are likely to both tell you and seek medical advice.

Dementia shouldn’t be taboo. Encourage conversation about it so that myths and stigma can be dispelled. Send a clear message that anyone with a problem related to dementia will be shown compassion, not the door.

DID YOU KNOW?

In general employees are not obliged to tell their employer if they are diagnosed with dementia. The exception is if they are in the armed forces, or work on a plane or a ship, in which case the law requires that they tell their employer if they receive a dementia diagnosis.

“I received no counselling, no transition from work to retirement due to disabilities. No leaving party.”

Agnes Houston, Campaigner

49% *9

People who feared they would be considered mad if they had dementia.
Many of the risk factors associated with dementia are related to lifestyle. These include: lack of exercise, type 2 diabetes, smoking, alcohol misuse, high blood pressure and obesity.

Look at what you, as an employer, can do to support your employees to adopt and enjoy lifestyles – within and outside of work – that minimise the risk.

**WEEKLY EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS (AGE 19 TO 64)**

- **150 MINS**: fast walking / moderate aerobic activity
- **OR 75 MINS**: running / other vigorous aerobic activity
- **OR 90 MINS**: one vigorous AND two moderate 30 minute bouts of activity
- **AND 2 DAYS**: minimum on which you do activities that strengthen major muscle groups (lifting, gardening, dancing, yoga, weights)

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Research suggests being seated for long periods increases your risk of bad health, including dementia. Experts recommend getting up and moving for a couple of minutes every 30-45 minutes. The damage of a sedentary working day isn’t undone by exercising before or after work.
Employees who are caring for someone who is living with dementia will need, and are entitled to, flexibility and support - and an appreciation, by you, that the demands on them will increase as the dementia progresses.

**WHAT WORKING CARERS WANT**

- Flexible and special arrangements for caring leave
- Publicity about and recognition of carers in the workplace so that they would feel able to ask for help
- More flexible arrangements for working hours and patterns, including remote working
- Information about support available to dementia carers
- Opportunities to link with other employees in a similar situation
- Emergency or back-up care or support arranged by their employer
- Support for reducing stress and improving their own wellbeing

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Under the Equality Act 2010 employees living with, or caring for someone who has, dementia have the right to request flexible working from their first day in post, and as many times as they need to each year.
4. Make preparatory changes for people living with dementia

Things that can be helpful for an employee with early stage dementia, for example well structured, clear and jargon-free internal communications, often benefit everyone. If you introduce dementia aware practices now your organisation won’t be caught off-guard as and when dementia becomes a live issue. Such improvements often require forethought or a change in habits rather than money.

For people with dementia the physical environment can either enable or further disable them. Design features which help them make sense of the world are not necessarily expensive, particularly where part of an initial build or scheduled refurbishment. These can include: good lighting; features that reduce noise such as carpets; and use of floor layout, signage and decor to make routes and facilities obvious.

This approach can be applied to changes to assist customers with dementia. Pricing, for example, could be kept simple to minimise potential for difficulty with handling money.

DID YOU KNOW?

Under the Equality Act 2010 providers of goods and services to the public are required to anticipate and make reasonable adjustments for disabled customers.

WHO CAN HELP?

Dementia Services Development Centre

Consultancy and training on making buildings and spaces dementia friendly.

www.dementia.stir.ac.uk
Dementia and the workplace

An employer that ensures all staff have regular supervision and an annual appraisal will be better placed to identify difficulties a staff member is experiencing because of early stage dementia, or any other form of cognitive impairment.

However one survey found that less than half of workers aged over 65 received formal performance appraisals as compared to almost two thirds of all employees. [*11]

CIPD
(Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)
The professional body for HR and people development.

www.cipd.co.uk

I started recognising that I wasn’t quite as sparky as I once was. That’s all I put it down to – just a dulling of the senses.

John, journalist

*8
Spotting the signs, taking the right action

Intervening

Deciding how and when to intervene when an employee shows signs that could be dementia can be complex. Move with as much caution as the situation allows: although if there is a health and safety risk that should be as soon as possible.

When the time is right, have a one to one meeting with the employee. Show empathy. A person with early stage dementia may not be aware that there is a problem, so tact and sensitivity will be essential. If they are aware that could mean that they are anxious and worried.

GETTING READY FOR A MEETING

✅ READ RELEVANT HR POLICIES
✅ SPEAK TO HR AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH COLLEAGUES (IF AVAILABLE)
✅ HAVE A CLEAR IDEA WHAT OUTCOME YOU WANT
✅ IDENTIFY A QUIET AND PRIVATE MEETING SPACE
✅ ALLOW TIME SO THE CONVERSATION ISN’T RUSHED
✅ START THE CONVERSATION WITH A FRIENDLY ENQUIRY, E.G. “HOW THINGS ARE WITH YOU?”
✅ CONSIDER HOW YOU WILL BROACH THE SUBJECT, E.G. “HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY CHANGES IN YOURSELF?”

WHO CAN HELP?

Healthy Working Lives
www.healthyworkinglives.com

Fit for Work Scotland
www.FitforWorkScotland.scot
Don’t put pressure on an employee to go on immediate sickness absence as this can undermine self-confidence and make it harder for them to continue in employment. It’s not the place of a line manager to speculate as to diagnosis. However a good outcome might be that the employee agrees to see their GP or occupational health.

DID YOU KNOW?
Dementia can impair the ability to understand or express language. When communicating with someone who may have dementia speak slowly and clearly, listen carefully, be patient and be aware of what you are saying through your body language.

I’ve definitely noticed a difference since he went back to work. The jumbling up of words isn’t so bad. He’s a lot cheerier and more talkative.

Wife of Joe, a handy-man
Making adjustments

Employers have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for an employee with dementia. These should address symptoms that disadvantage the employee in the workplace. What’s ‘reasonable’ will depend on the size and resources of the organisation, and how practical and effective the adjustments would be.

If costs are incurred these can’t be passed to the employee.

An employer may need to make changes to how things are done at work - its policies and procedures. Physical changes to the workplace may be necessary, for example to improve lighting and layout. It may need to provide extra aids or support.

The starting point for identifying adjustments is to talk to the employee. Look together at their job description. What can they still do, with or without support? Are there safety-critical, or people management aspects, that may need to stop? If changes to working hours, or their level of responsibility, are being considered there may be financial implications for the employee that should be discussed.

If he or she is finding it more difficult to learn new things moving to another job, even a less challenging one, could be counterproductive.

SOME ADJUSTMENT POSSIBILITIES

- Better lit environment
- Noise reduction
- Calendars, checklists, reminders
- Quality checking system
- Some duties reallocated
- Changes to start/finish times
- Reduction in hours
- Homeworking
- Time off for check-ups and treatment
- Extra or tailored briefings
- Support from a ‘buddy’
- Mentoring or counselling support
Managing over time

Receiving a diagnosis for dementia can be very difficult emotionally. Be supportive and let the employee know that they are valued. Make a plan together that includes:

- What the employee wants
- Your needs as an employer
- Adjustments that you’ve agreed
- People involved in supporting him or her in work
- Any arrangements for informing colleagues of the diagnosis
- A schedule setting out when and how the situation will be reviewed

Research has suggested that whether or not someone is able to keep working after diagnosis depends on factors including: their stage of dementia, the level of insight they have into their own symptoms, and the strength of their support network in and outside of work. Consider what you as an employer can do to support the development of such a network.

Be aware that adjustments for an employee can sometimes have an impact on their co-workers. Supportive colleagues can be a huge asset for enabling someone to stay in employment.

However it’s possible that some may, for example, be annoyed at having to take on additional duties. It may be necessary to look at their job descriptions, and whether some of the adjustments you are making could be learning or development opportunities for them.

Continuing in work is not always a realistic option. Even if it is now, eventually it won’t be: dementia is progressive so an employee’s capabilities will inevitably decline. When that time comes make your employee’s leaving as positive as it can be.

He or she may need information about benefits and pensions, and support to complete any paperwork associated with these. They may be feeling anxious about loss of their work identity and work’s social aspects. When they leave consider how you might recognise, and if appropriate celebrate, their contribution.
Access to Work
Grants for workplace disability adjustments.
www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Alzheimer’s Scotland
Information on dementia including post-diagnosis support.
www.alzscot.org.uk

Silver Line Scotland
Later life information and advice including benefits checks.
0800 4 70 80 90

Now & Next
Workshops to support employees in planning ahead in the later stages of their career.
www.nowandnext.scot

Healthy working lives
www.healthyworkinglives.com
Working Health Services Scotland
0800 019 2211
Fit for Work Scotland
www.FitforWorkScotland.scot
ACAS
www.acas.org.uk
Federation of Small Businesses
www.fsb.org.uk

“Now we have a Health Passport, which means they can’t throw new stuff at him and expect him to do it.”

Wife of employee with dementia
The HR officer

Promote: Ensure all staff are aware of existing policies that benefit people with disabilities and carers.

Review: Check your policies and procedures to ensure they will enable you to respond to employees with dementia, and carers, effectively, fairly and legally.

Proof: When introducing or reviewing systems or processes think about whether these could potentially disadvantage a worker who has dementia, for example electronic pay slips.

Support: Be proactive in encouraging healthy working lives that reduce the risk of dementia. Support discussion of and information about dementia and carers in the workplace.

ACTION PLAN

SAME SURVEY

83% - Employers offering flexible working arrangements
48% - Carers reporting flexible working was available
The manager

**Pre-empt:** Instigate changes to working culture and practice that will be helpful should dementia become a live workplace issue, for example improving internal communications.

**Develop:** Look at how products and services could be made more accessible to people living with dementia. Areas to look at include premises, pricing, publications and staff training.

**Respond:** If a regular customer or client shows signs of dementia ensure as far as possible that they are served by the same member of staff each time.
The customer-facing employee

Respect: You won’t necessarily be able to tell who has dementia, so make ‘dementia friendly’ your default mode. Speak clearly and calmly, and be friendly and patient, with everyone.

Respond: If a customer seems forgetful or confused, ask how you can help. They might, for example, welcome:

- Some suggested options if they are struggling to choose
- Help with handling money
- Help to find their way around – with clear directions or even a simple map
- A quiet and well-lit environment where they can hear you properly and see your face clearly.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some people with dementia carry a help card so that they can discreetly ask for your understanding. It may simply say that they have a problem with their memory.
Every staff member

Act: If you notice a colleague is struggling with thinking, memory or communication, speak in confidence to your manager or HR team. It may not be dementia. But if it is, ignoring, resenting or covering up declining performance won’t help in the long run.

Talk: It’s good to speak openly about dementia. When you do, think about words you use. Many people with dementia say that they feel stigmatised when referred to as ‘suffering’ or being in ‘misery.’

Change: Look at your own lifestyle - is there anything you could change to reduce the risk of dementia?

Prepare: Take precautions, whatever your age. Make a will. Arrange a Power of Attorney - so that should you ever become unable to take important decisions, because of dementia or any other reason, someone you trust will be legally able to step in.

WHO CAN HELP?

Silver Line Scotland
Later life information including on Power of Attorney
0800 4 70 80 90
www.agescotland.org.uk/poa

Smokeline 0800 84 84 84
www.canstopsmoking.com

Drinkline 0300 123 1110
www.drinksmarter.org

NHS Inform 0800 22 44 88
(fitness and diet advice)

Active Scotland
www.activescotland.org.uk

Take on life
www.takelifeon.co.uk
The trade union representative

Spot: Be alert to the possibility of dementia when investigating capability and misconduct cases.

Support: Encourage members to seek medical advice when action is being taken against them, should they be showing uncharacteristic difficulty with thinking, communication or memory.

Collaborate: Work with employers and occupational health providers to develop strategies and policies that:
• Support adjustments for workers with dementia,
• Support staff who care for family members or friends living with dementia
• Make your workplace more dementia aware.

STUC (Scottish Trades Union Congress)
The STUC Disabled Workers’ Committee carries out a range of work to tackle discrimination against disabled people in and out-with the workplace.

www.stuc.org.uk
The Occupational Health professional

**Know:** Familiarise yourself with the signs, symptoms and progression of different types of dementia.

**Connect:** A range of health care professionals can contribute to vocational rehabilitation and supporting an employee with early stage dementia in work. These include Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists.

**WHO CAN HELP?**

**Alzheimer’s Scotland**
Information on dementia including post-diagnosis support available in Scotland.

[www.alzscot.org.uk](http://www.alzscot.org.uk)

**Alzheimer’s Society**
Information on dementia.

[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)
**Further information and support**

**Age Scotland and Silver Line Scotland**
Information, advice and support for matters pertaining to later life.

0800 4 70 80 90
www.agescotland.org.uk

**Access to Work**
Grants for practical support if an employee has a disability, health or mental health condition up to a maximum of £40,800 per year.

0345 268 8489
www.gov.uk/access-to-work

**Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)**
Information, advice, training, conciliation and other services for employers and employees to help prevent or resolve workplace problems.

0300 123 1100
www.acas.org.uk

**Alzheimer’s Scotland**
Information on dementia including post-diagnosis support.

0808 808 3000
www.alzscot.org

**Alzheimer Scotland Centre for Policy and Practice at University of West of Scotland**
A centre of excellence advancing dementia policy and practice.

01698 283100
www.uws.ac.uk/ascpp
**Carer Positive**
An award recognising employers for support that they give to employees who are carers.

[www.carerpositive.org](http://www.carerpositive.org)

**CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)**
The professional body for HR and people development.

**020 8612 6200**
[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

**Dementia Services Development Centre**
An international centre of knowledge and expertise.

**01786 467740**
[www.dementia.stir.ac.uk](http://www.dementia.stir.ac.uk)

**Employers for Carers**
A membership forum for employers committed to working carers. It offers resources, networking facilities, model policies, case studies, training and consultancy.

**020 7378 4956**
[www.employersforcarers.org](http://www.employersforcarers.org)

**Federation of Small Businesses**
A membership body offering services including advice, financial expertise, support and a voice in government.

**0808 20 20 888**
[www.fsb.org.uk](http://www.fsb.org.uk)
Fit for Work Scotland
Free, confidential and impartial advice to employees, employers, and GPs, to help people return to, and stay in, work after a period of sickness absence.
0800 019 2211
www.FitforWorkScotland.scot

Healthy Working Lives
Free occupational health and safety advice for employers in Scotland covering a range of health and safety issues.
0800 019 2211
www.healthyworkinglives.com

STUC
Scottish Trades Union Congress.
T. 0141 337 8100
W. www.stuc.org.uk

Working Health Services Scotland
An NHS service assisting the self-employed and employees of small enterprises (less than 50 staff) who experience injury or ill health and have difficulty remaining at work.
0800 019 2211
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