

Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications, National Dementia Helpline, website, and around 3,000 local services.

We campaign for better quality of life for people with dementia and greater understanding of dementia. We also fund an innovative programme of medical and social research into the cause, cure and prevention of dementia and the care people receive.

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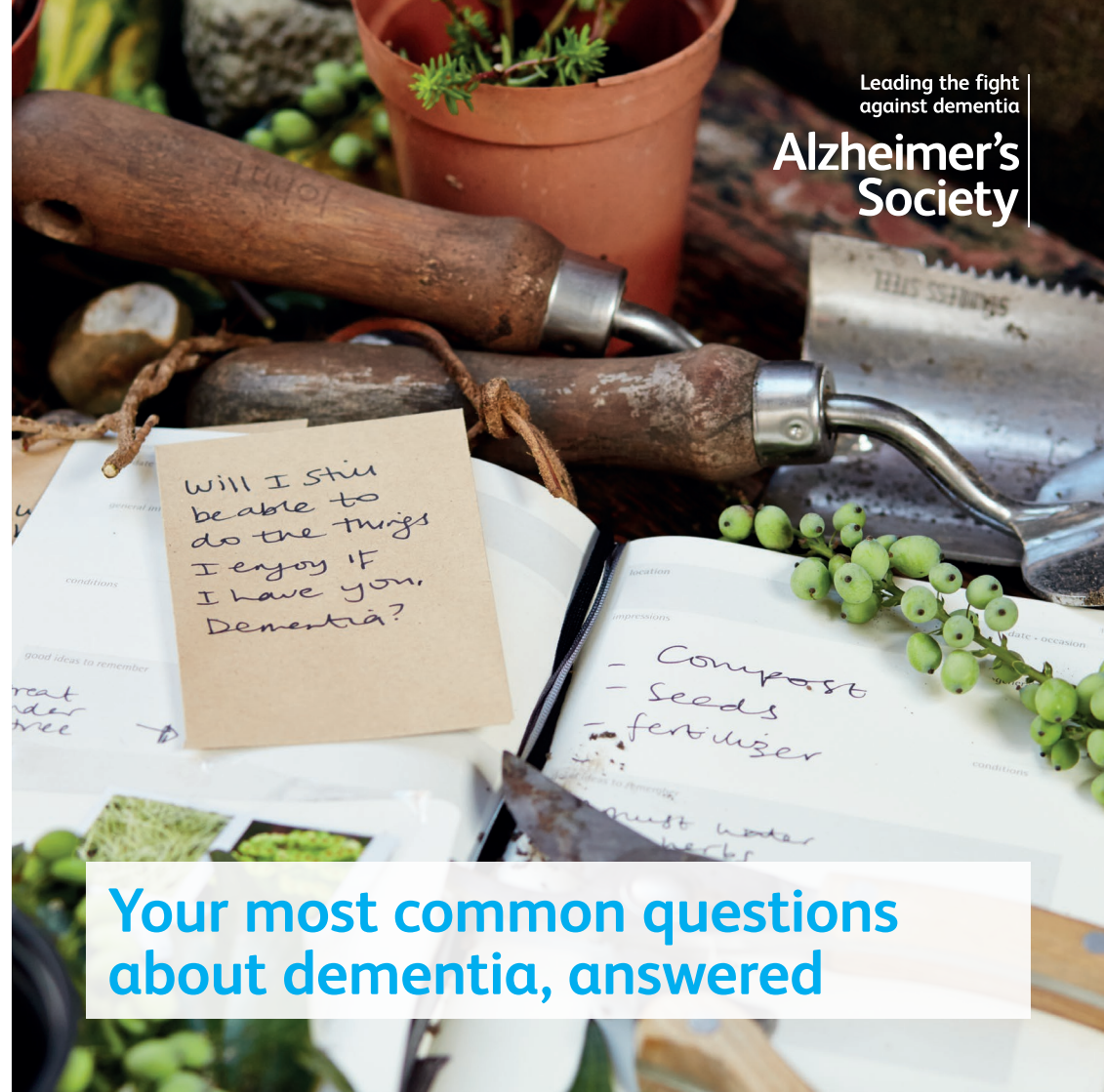
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Leading the fight  
against dementia  
**Alzheimer's  
Society**

Leading the fight  
against dementia

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**Your most common questions  
about dementia, answered**



## Do you have questions about dementia?

If so, you're not alone.

Every day Alzheimer's Society answers thousands of people's questions about dementia.

They may be worried about a loved one, living with the condition themselves, or just want to find out more about something that will affect a million of us in the UK by 2025.

That's why we've put together answers to some of the most common questions, so you can better understand dementia and get the support you need.

In the following pages you'll find the facts on everything; from what dementia is, to what happens after a dementia diagnosis.

For information, help and support, visit [alzheimers.org.uk](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk)  
or phone our National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122

## What is dementia?

Dementia describes a group of symptoms that occur when the brain is damaged by a disease. It affects daily life and is progressive, which means the symptoms will gradually get worse.

There are many different diseases that cause dementia. The most common is Alzheimer's disease but other types of dementia include vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies and frontotemporal dementia (Pick's disease).

## What dementia looks like

You might already know that memory loss can be one symptom. Other symptoms may include difficulties with planning, solving problems, or struggling to find the right word at the right time.

Many people also have problems judging distances even though their eyes are fine. Or sometimes they experience mood changes or behave in ways that are out of character.

The symptoms that a person with dementia experiences will depend on the disease causing the dementia and the parts of the brain that are damaged.

## I've started forgetting things. Does that mean I've got dementia?

A PIN number. Your keys. The star of your favourite film.

Forgetting things doesn't mean you definitely have dementia. Everyone is forgetful from time to time and it can be an annoying part of everyday life, rather than something more serious.

However, memory loss is the most common symptom of dementia.

So if you find your memory is getting noticeably worse, or forgetfulness is affecting your daily life, make an appointment to see your GP.

They can help you rule out problems that have similar symptoms to dementia (like depression and thyroid deficiencies) which can be treated.

The earlier you seek help, the sooner you'll know what you're up against and can get the information, advice and support you need.

## Dementia is not a normal part of ageing

Dementia mainly affects people over the age of 65 (one in 14 people in this age group have dementia), and the likelihood of developing dementia increases significantly with age. However, dementia is not an inevitable sign of getting old. It is caused by changes to the structure and chemistry of the brain.

Dementia can also affect younger people too. At least 40,000 people in the UK live with early-onset or young-onset dementia.





## I'm worried about someone else. What can I do to help?

It can be worrying if someone you know is showing symptoms of dementia.

Maybe they're finding it hard to remember the right word, or becoming confused when they're in a familiar environment. Perhaps they've started behaving out of character. Other people may also have commented that they seem different.

If you're concerned about someone close to you, encourage them to visit their GP. You could share your concerns with them over a cup of tea. Start the conversation by gently asking them if they've been feeling any different from usual, or are struggling with anything.

It's important to remember that it might not be dementia, but even if it is, there's lots that can be done after a diagnosis to support someone to live well with the condition.

**You can also call** our National Dementia Helpline ([0300 222 1122](tel:03002221122)) to talk about your concerns, or suggest they do for reassurance and support.

## **My Gran had dementia. Does that mean I'll get it too?**

No. Most people don't inherit dementia from another family member.

There are exceptions, but these tend to be with rare forms of dementia, or when someone develops the condition very young.

Having a parent, brother or sister with Alzheimer's disease may increase your chances of developing the condition very slightly, but that doesn't mean it's inevitable.

## **Is there anything I can do to prevent dementia?**

There's no way to completely eliminate your chances of getting dementia. However, scientists have found there are positive lifestyle changes you can make which will reduce your risk of dementia. Steps you can take right now include:

### **Keeping fit, eating a balanced diet and stopping smoking**

Try to keep physically active – enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat – for at least 30 minutes, five times a week. Eat a Mediterranean-style diet and drink within the government's recommended levels of alcohol. Try to stop smoking – smoking significantly increases your chance of developing dementia.

### **Keeping your brain active and staying social**

People who regularly do brain-challenging activities are less likely to develop dementia. Learning a new language, reading, or doing puzzles such as crosswords or Sudoku, all give your brain a workout. Being social may reduce the risk of dementia as well.

### **Taking control of your health**

Managing your health by keeping an eye on your weight, blood pressure and any underlying diseases such as diabetes or heart problems will help reduce your dementia risk. If you are invited for a health check, be sure to go.

## What happens at a dementia assessment?

If you think you might have dementia, visit your GP and tell them what's worrying you.

They'll listen to your concerns and arrange for further investigation if necessary. This usually includes asking you for background information, carrying out blood or urine tests to rule out other conditions and doing a short mental test. Remember that you don't have to go alone, and many people take along a friend or family member for support.

Your GP may refer you to a local memory clinic or hospital specialist. Staff there will be able to perform assessments to give you a definite diagnosis and talk you through potential treatment and support.

## What happens after a diagnosis?

There's no 'right' way to respond to a dementia diagnosis.

People tell us that they feel a range of emotions after being told they have dementia.

They might be fearful or feel a sense of sadness or loss. Sometimes they are shocked or can't believe the news. Some people are angry, but others are also relieved to find out there's a medical reason behind their problems.

Dementia can be hard to come to terms with, but Alzheimer's Society can help by providing information, advice and support.

## Are there any treatments that can help?

There's currently no cure for dementia. In some cases a doctor will prescribe drugs that can help with symptoms for a while.

However, with the right treatment, advice and support, many people who have the condition lead active, fulfilling lives.

People with dementia should be offered the chance to attend groups or take part in activities that may help them, or anyone caring for them, to better cope.

At Alzheimer's Society we encourage people living with dementia to think about their future, and support them to plan ahead with friends and family.

Local social services can play their part by doing an assessment, which may lead to help at home, and support that helps the person make choices about their lives.

**For more information** about life after a diagnosis visit [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide) or phone our National Dementia Helpline on **0300 222 1122**



## How will dementia affect my life?

Living with dementia is a challenge.

It's not just challenging for the person with dementia, but for their family, friends and carers too.

When someone is diagnosed, their plans for the future might change. They may need help and support with everyday tasks or to keep doing the activities they enjoy.

Everyone will experience the condition in their own way. How it affects someone over time is unique to each individual – their own attitude, relationships with others and surroundings will all have an impact.

But dementia won't change who they are. With a positive outlook and the right support, it's possible for someone with dementia to live well and still get the best out of life.





## Have another question?

Whatever your questions about dementia, Alzheimer's Society is here for you.

We provide a range of services and resources to support people with dementia, their family, friends and carers.

### National Dementia Helpline

The Helpline is for anyone who is affected by dementia or worried about their memory. Trained advisers provide information, support, guidance and signposting to other organisations that can help.

Call **0300 222 1122** or email: [helpline@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:helpline@alzheimers.org.uk)

### Talking Point

Talking Point is an online support and discussion forum for anyone affected by dementia available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

[alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint](https://alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint)

### Printed and online information

You can read and order publications online at [alzheimers.org.uk/publications](https://alzheimers.org.uk/publications)  
You can also order copies by phoning **0300 303 5933**

### Local services

Alzheimer's Society provides a range of local services for people with dementia and their carers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To find services near to you, visit [alzheimers.org.uk/localinformation](https://alzheimers.org.uk/localinformation)  
or call our National Dementia Helpline on **0300 222 1122**

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