

**Memory Advice
Service**



Worried About Your Memory Quick Guide



Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with a summary of information about some of the common causes of memory loss related to ageing and various health conditions. If you are worried that your memory or cognitive (thinking) difficulties are occurring frequently and impacting on your daily life, we suggest that you contact your GP to be assessed.

Age Related Memory Loss

It is normal for our memory to change as we get older. Common age-related memory problems include:

- Difficulty remembering names and recognising faces.
- Sometimes forgetting words
- Occasionally misplacing items
- Difficulty in remembering details about recent events
- Less able to multi-task
- Easily distracted.
- Less able to return to a task if interrupted.
- Slower processing of information

Health Conditions That Can Cause Memory Loss

There are many health conditions that can cause people to struggle with their memory or concentration and to feel more confused. Some of these are treatable and reversible. **If you are concerned that you are experiencing memory difficulties as a result of a health condition or medication, it is important to speak to your GP in the first instance.**

Below are a few common health conditions that can cause memory difficulties:

Stress, anxiety and depression

High levels of stress, anxiety and / or depression can hinder the ability for short term memories to be turned into long term memories. The ability to focus, think clearly and make decisions can also be affected. There are talking therapies and medication available to help manage stress, anxiety and depression.

Sleep Deprivation

Regular difficulties with getting enough sleep can cause difficulties with attention, concentration, memory and decision making.

Menopause

The loss of the hormone Oestrogen before and during the menopause can cause temporary difficulties with short term memory and verbal fluency. There are a few menopause symptoms that people may experience such as difficulty sleeping, anxiety and depression that can further contribute to memory difficulties. There are treatments available that can help to alleviate some of the symptoms associated with the menopause.

Neurological conditions

It is common for individuals with a neurological condition such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis or epilepsy to experience memory difficulties. If you are experiencing new difficulties with your memory or thinking abilities in general, contact your GP.

Head injury

It is common for people to experience temporary memory difficulties if they have had a head injury. If you feel your memory or thinking abilities are getting worse, contact your GP.

History of stroke

Individuals who have had a stroke may struggle with their memory, thinking abilities and language, depending on which part of the brain has been affected. As the person recovers from the stroke, these symptoms can often improve. If symptoms start to get worse, contact your GP.

Vitamin B12 deficiency

Vitamin B12 deficiency can cause a variety of symptoms including increased tiredness and a decline in mental abilities such as memory, understanding and judgement. It is important to see your GP to explore treatment for this as some of the health problems caused by this are irreversible if left untreated.

Thyroid dysfunction

When an individual's thyroid is not functioning properly, it can cause difficulties with concentration, reaction time, memory and language.

High alcohol intake

Excessive alcohol intake can cause difficulties with forming new memories. If you are concerned that you may be consuming too much alcohol and would like support to reduce your consumption, speak to your GP, who should be able to put you in touch with relevant support services.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

A urinary tract infection can cause a sudden change in mood and behaviour, increase confusion, cause unsteadiness in mobility and affect the person's appetite. UTI's are treatable and sometimes preventable. It is important to access treatment as soon as possible to reduce the impact of the infection.

Delirium

Delirium is a sudden change in someone's mental state (usually within a couple of days). A variety of symptoms can be experienced such as increased confusion, distorted thinking, hallucinations, irritability, lack of energy and tiredness. Delirium is usually caused by a decline in someone's physical health such as infection, pain, constipation, dehydration, poor nutrition, a change in medication and abnormal salt and sugar levels. Sometimes being admitted to hospital and coping with an unfamiliar environment can cause delirium. People who have multiple physical health difficulties, are frail and over 65 years old are more at risk of delirium. Delirium is treated by first trying to resolve any physical health conditions that may have caused it. Getting treatment as soon as possible will help to reduce the risk of the delirium having a lasting effect on someone's mental state.

Medication you may be taking

Some medications that are prescribed or available over the counter can cause memory difficulties, including but not limited to anti-depressants, anti-histamines, cholesterol medication and pain

medication. Your GP should be able to review your medication.

Anaesthesia from recent surgery

Anaesthesia can cause short term changes in thinking and memory after surgery. Some people may take longer to recover from this than others, for example, older people and those with other medical conditions.

Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy

Difficulties with concentrating, thinking or remembering things can sometimes occur during or after cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and some forms of radiotherapy. These difficulties are mostly reversible but can take many months to resolve.

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

Mild Cognitive Impairment is a condition where people have mild difficulties with their memory and thinking abilities, but it is not severe enough to be classed as dementia.

Functional Cognitive Disorder (FCD)

Memory difficulties in FCD are caused by the brain's difficulty with attention and concentration. This results in the person finding it difficult to learn and remember new information. The hallmark of this condition is that the symptoms vary throughout the day- sometimes your memory will be better than others.

Do I have dementia?

Dementia is a progressive condition caused by different diseases that cause damage to the brain. People can experience a variety of symptoms more severe than normal ageing to the extent that that can start to have an impact on everyday life.

Early symptoms can include:

- Short term memory loss
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Changes in mood and behaviour
- Word finding difficulties / problems with language
- Struggling with everyday tasks

Ageing vs Dementia

The Alzheimer's Society have produced some examples of normal ageing vs dementia below. It is important not to use this information to self-diagnose but as a tool to help you consider the severity of your difficulties. There are different types of dementia and symptoms will vary from person to person. If you are concerned about the difficulties you are experiencing, speak to your GP to discuss this further.

Memory and new information

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
Forgetting something you were told a while ago	Forgetting something you were only recently told. You may ask for the same information repeatedly – for example, 'Are the doors locked?'
Misplacing things from time to time – for example, your phone, glasses or the TV	Putting objects in unusual places – for example, putting your house keys in the bathroom cabinet

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
remote – but retracing steps to find them	
Taking longer to work out new tasks, such as how to set up and use a new appliance or device	Being unable to learn new tasks, like setting up and using a new appliance or device

Planning and decision making

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
Being a bit slower when planning, but being able to think things through	Getting very confused when planning or thinking things through
Finding it harder to do several tasks at once, but being able to focus on a single task	Struggling to stay focused on a single task

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
Occasionally making decisions without fully thinking them through	Not making informed, careful decisions when dealing with money or looking at risks
Sometimes making a mistake with a new payment, but being able to manage overall budgets	Finding it hard to manage regular payments, like budgets or monthly bills

Language (speech and conversation)

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
Occasionally struggling to find the right word, but remembering it eventually	Having frequent problems finding the right word or regularly referring to objects as 'that thing'
Needing to concentrate harder to keep up with a conversation, but	Finding it hard to take part in conversations

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
being able to join in when focused	
Losing track of the conversation if you're distracted or if many people are speaking at once	Regularly being unable to follow what someone is saying even without distractions

Orientation (having a sense of time and place)

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
Getting confused about the day or the week but figuring it out later	Losing track of the date, season or the passage of time
Getting lost in a place you don't know well, but being able to figure out where you need to be	Getting lost in a place that is familiar or that should be easy to find your way around – for example, a supermarket

Vision and perception (understanding what is being seen)

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer’s disease or vascular dementia
Having misty or cloudy vision, caused by cataracts or other changes in the eyes	Having problems making sense of what you see – for example, having difficulty judging distances on stairs, or mistaking reflections or patterns for other objects

Mood and behaviour

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer’s disease or vascular dementia
Sometimes feeling reluctant to join in at work, family and social meetings	Becoming withdrawn and losing interest in work, friends or hobbies
Sometimes feeling a bit low or anxious	Getting unusually sad, anxious , frightened or low in confidence

Common signs of ageing	Possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia
Becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted, but being able to cope with the change	Getting easily upset at home, at work, with friends or in places that usually feel comfortable or familiar

Reduce your risk of dementia

“What’s good for your heart is good for your brain”

Below is a list of key lifestyle changes that can reduce the risk of dementia. For further information, contact the Memory Advice Service.

- **Regular exercise:** good for cardiovascular health and mental wellbeing.
- **Healthy diet:** Reduce salt, sugar and red meat, eat more vegetables, fruits and pulses and use plant-based oils rather than animal fats. This will help reduce the risk of conditions such as dementia, cancer, diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

- **Don't smoke:** Smoking can harm the circulation system and damage the blood vessels in the brain.
- **Reduce alcohol consumption:** Excessive alcohol consumption can cause damage to the brain and organs in your body.
- **Stay social:** As well as being good for lifting mood, social interaction maintains short term memory and communication skills.
- **Keep your mind active:** Activities such as learning new things, doing wordsearches, puzzles craft, reading and playing a musical instrument challenge the brain and help to maintain thinking processes.
- **Sleep well:** Having adequate sleep is good for mental wellbeing and may reduce the risk of dementia.
- **Check your hearing:** Hearing loss may be a risk factor for developing dementia because of the impact that this condition can have on people's ability to communicate and engage in usual activities.
- **Protect your head:** When you have an injury to the brain (caused by a blow to the head), substances linked to Alzheimer's Disease can build up around the injured site.

Coping with memory difficulties

- Try different strategies to find what works for you
- Use your strengths to help you with things you find difficult
- Routine – having the same routine can help people to maintain their skills with every day activities.
- A place for everything
- Reduce distractions – this will help you to concentrate on conversations and tasks.
- One thing at a time- break a task down into manageable chunks that your memory can cope with.
- Consider the timing of a task- is your memory better at certain times in the day?
- Give yourself more time to achieve a task.
- Reduce causes of stress or frustration as this can make your memory worse.
- Talk about your day to strengthen your short term and long term memory.
- Assistive Technology: There are many gadgets around to help people remember things during the day and to keep people safe and independent at home.

- **Labels:** Placing labels on cupboards can help to remind you of where things are kept. You can use words or pictures.
- **Simple environment:** Try to reduce clutter in your environment to make it easier to find things.
- **Support from family, friends and professionals:** If you are struggling with every day tasks or worried about your memory, it is useful to speak to people to explore different support options.

Memory Assessment Service

If you have contacted your GP to discuss your memory concerns, the usual process is that the GP would take some information about how long you have been experiencing difficulties and what things you are struggling with. The GP would also administer a short memory test and assess your physical health to rule out any medical conditions which could be causing the memory difficulties.

Based on the GP's assessment, you may be referred to a specialist for further investigation. Depending on these results, some people are referred to neurology but most people are referred to the Memory Assessment Service for further investigation.

The Memory Assessment Service / Neurologist will ask you to complete further memory assessments and may refer you for a head scan. They will also speak to you and those involved in your care about your difficulties to get a picture of how your memory is impacting on your life.

When the results of these tests have been received, you will then be given a diagnosis.

Further information and support:

- **Local support if you are worried about your memory or waiting for a memory assessment:** Memory Advice Service, Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland, 0116 2237363 memory.advice@ageukleics.org.uk
- **Local support for people affected by dementia:** Dementia Support Service, Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland, 0116 2237363 dementia.support@ageukleics.org.uk
- **NHS:** for information about health conditions that can impact on memory and cognition: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>
- **Information to help if you are waiting for a memory assessment:** <https://www.nextsteps.org.uk/>
- **More information about dementia and strategies to help with memory loss:** <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/>