

What is dementia?



Who we are

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life.

Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people can make the most of later life.

Our three strategic aims are to:



Help older people to be as well as they can be



Promote a positive view of ageing and later life



Tackle loneliness and isolation

How we can help

We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

The Age Scotland **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.

For information, advice and friendship



Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222
(Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm)



Visit agescotland.org.uk
to find out more.

Contents

What is dementia?	p1
Types of dementia	p1
Risk factors	p3
Reducing your risk	p3
Signs and symptoms	p4
What else can affect memory or thinking skills?	p5
What do I do if I am worried?	p6
What if it is dementia?	p7
Useful contacts	p5

What is dementia?

Dementia is a set of symptoms caused by damage to the brain from certain diseases or conditions. Dementia usually gets worse over time and there is currently no cure.

Symptoms can include problems with memory, thinking, mental agility, language and understanding. Dementia is common, and as people live longer more people have family and friends who are living with dementia.

Types of dementia

There are around 100 conditions which cause dementia. Some types are more common than others.

- **Alzheimer's disease** causes damage to brain cells. It is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for around two thirds of cases.
- **Vascular dementia** is the second most common type of dementia. It is caused by a reduced blood supply to the brain due to conditions such as high blood pressure, stroke or irregular heart rhythms.
- **Dementia with Lewy Bodies** accounts for around 10 percent of cases. Lewy bodies are tiny deposits of protein that can build up in the cells of the brain and cause damage.
- **Frontotemporal dementia** is caused when abnormal proteins in the brain damage brain cells.
- **Posterior Cortical Atrophy** is a form of Alzheimer's disease which causes damage to the brain cells at the back of the brain (posterior). This part of the brain is vital for judging space and distance, and for making sense of what we see.

- **HIV associated dementia** affects around 50 percent of people with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV can also affect brain function and motor skills.
- **Parkinson's with dementia** is a condition that some people experience in the later stages of Parkinson's disease. It is thought to be caused by a build-up of Lewy bodies in brain cells.
- **Korsakoff's syndrome** is a type of a dementia that does not get worse over time. It is usually caused by excessive alcohol consumption.
- **Mixed dementia** is when someone has more than one type of dementia. It is common to have both Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia together.

Risk factors

Many people think that if their parents had dementia then they will get it too. Certain genes can increase the risk slightly, and some forms of Alzheimer's disease are genetic and passed through family, however these are very rare.

There is a link between severe or repeated head injury and dementia.

The biggest risk factor for dementia is age, particularly for those over the age of 65.

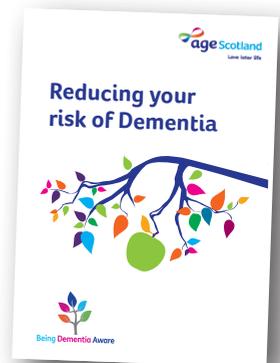
More than two thirds of people living with dementia are female.

Reducing your risk

You may have seen stories in the media claiming a cure for dementia is just around the corner. Many different treatments are being investigated, however it is likely to be several years or even decades before a cure is found.

The good news is there are many things you can do to reduce your risk of developing dementia. What is good for your heart is also good for your head, so eating a balanced diet and doing regular physical activity are very important. Stopping smoking and reducing alcohol consumption can help as well.

For more information see Age Scotland's guide **Reducing your Risk of Dementia**.



Signs and symptoms

Dementia affects everyone differently, however common symptoms in the early stage of dementia include:

- difficulties with short-term memory – losing things, forgetting peoples' names or the names of everyday objects.
- language difficulties and struggling to follow conversations
- problems with spatial awareness – difficulty parking, crossing roads, judging distances or the size and shape of objects.
- feeling confused or disorientated
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulties with planning and organising – not turning up to routine appointments or struggling to do everyday tasks
- changes in mood and behaviour
- sleep disturbances
- changes to appetite
- problems with vision – failing to spot things that are close by, or being unable to tell coins and notes apart when handling money.

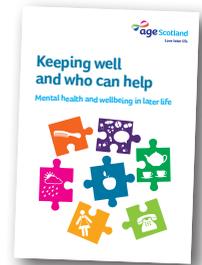
The different types of dementia have different symptoms and progress in different ways. For example, Alzheimer's disease tends to progress gradually, whilst people living with vascular dementia can have long periods where symptoms are stable followed by periods where symptoms rapidly get worse.

What else can affect memory or thinking skills?

Many people think that dementia is memory loss, and memory loss is dementia, but being forgetful doesn't necessarily mean someone has dementia. A slight decline in memory is normal as people age, but a lot of things can affect your memory:

Physical health problems that can affect memory and thinking include stroke, infections, thyroid problems, nutritional deficiencies and diabetes. Not drinking enough fluids, the side effects of medicines, smoking, drinking alcohol heavily and not sleeping well can have an impact too.

Mental health problems including stress, depression, anxiety or grief can cause memory and thinking problems. Our guide **Mental health and wellbeing – keeping well and who can help** provides information about staying mentally well.



Changes to senses as people get older may seem like problems with memory, when in fact changes to the senses are getting in the way of remembering. Most people can bring back memories through their senses, for example looking at a photograph, listening to a piece of music or smelling familiar food.

Mild cognitive impairment is a medical diagnosis which is not the same as regular ageing, but not dementia. This diagnosis is given when someone has problems with memory or thinking beyond what can be expected because of normal ageing. Mild cognitive impairment is usually stable, and can sometimes get better if it is related to a treatable illness such as depression. People with mild cognitive impairment are at greater risk of developing dementia than the general population, so it is important that they have regular medical checks and appropriate treatment.

What do I do if I am worried?

If you are worried that you, or someone you care for, may have dementia, the best place to start is talking to your GP.

It will help the GP if you can give a clear description of what is worrying you, so you might want to make a note of what is going on and what the symptoms are.

A typical GP appointment is around 10 minutes long. If you need more time to explain things you can book a double appointment.

It is important to be open and honest with the GP. The GP will listen, ask questions and discuss your concerns. They may want to carry out physical health checks, basic tests for memory and review any medicines to see what is causing the symptoms.

The GP may make a referral to an expert memory clinic to help with the diagnosis. Memory clinics are staffed by a range of specialists including psychologists and psychiatrists. The staff will discuss the symptoms and may carry out some tests to check memory and thinking.

Diagnosing dementia can take some time and involve several appointments and tests over a number of weeks or months.

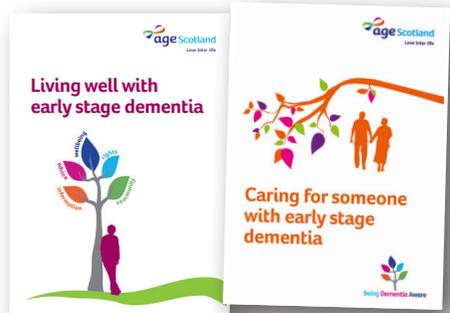
If someone does have dementia, a correct diagnosis at an early stage is important for treatment, support, and planning for the future.

What if it is dementia?

People react in different ways to a diagnosis of dementia. A diagnosis might be a relief or make someone shocked, sad, fearful or angry. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

There are a lot of organisations that can support you and help you plan for the future. With the right support in place many people with dementia can live well and lead fulfilling lives for many years.

For more information see Age Scotland's guides **Living well with early stage dementia** and **Caring for someone with early stage dementia**.



Useful contacts

Age Scotland

Age Scotland is the largest charity in Scotland dedicated to enabling everyone to make the most of later life. We provide information for people through our publications and online. The Age Scotland Helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

Age Scotland Helpline: **0800 12 44 222**

www.agescotland.org.uk

Alzheimer Scotland

Alzheimer Scotland campaigns for the rights of people with dementia and their families and provide an extensive range of innovative and personalised support services.

Freephone 24 Hour Dementia Helpline: **0808 808 3000**

www.alzscot.org



Being Dementia Aware

This information guide has been prepared by Age Scotland and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and cannot be used as a substitute for professional advice.

Neither Age Scotland nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use and it is the reader's sole responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate.

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

How you can help

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life.

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- ▶ Call **03330 15 14 60**
- ▶ Visit **age.scot/donate**
- ▶ Text **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.*



Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

* Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

Let's keep in touch



Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today by visiting age.scot/roundup



Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



[/agescotland](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)



[@AgeScotland](https://twitter.com/AgeScotland)



[@age_scotland](https://www.instagram.com/age_scotland)



[/AgeScotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AgeScotland)

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life.

Contact us:

Head office

0333 323 2400

Age Scotland helpline

0800 12 44 222

Email

info@agescotland.org.uk

Visit our website

www.agescotland.org.uk

Follow us on social media:



/agescotland



@AgeScotland



@age_scotland



/AgeScotland



We are grateful to the
Scottish Government for
part-funding this publication

