

INTRODUCTION TO DEMENTIA

Factsheet

There are currently around 900,000 people in the UK living with a dementia mainly affecting people over the age of 65. Within this age group 1 in 11 people will have a dementia, with the likelihood of developing dementia increasing significantly with age. Dementia can also affect younger people.

What is dementia?

The word 'dementia' is used to describe the symptoms of a number of different diseases or conditions that cause the progressive decline of the brain. These changes are often small to start with but for someone with a dementia they are severe enough to affect daily life.

Types of dementia

There are many forms of dementia including:

- Alzheimer's disease
- Vascular dementia
- Dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB)

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia accounting for about two thirds of cases in people over the age of 65. It is also possible to have more than one type of dementia at the same time.

Alzheimer's can sometimes be seen with vascular dementia or dementia with Lewy bodies which is known as 'mixed dementia'. They have some things in common but there are also important differences in how they affect people and the ways they can be managed. There are rare diseases which can also lead to dementia.

Spotting the symptoms

Dementia can cause a number of different symptoms. Some of the most common include:

Memory loss

It will gradually become clear that the memory loss is becoming more severe and persistent if there is particular difficulty in remembering new events or information. This will often be more apparent to family and friends than to the person themselves.

Change in behaviour

Dementia can make the world a confusing and disorientating place as the person struggles to understand what is going on around them. They no longer recognise or relate to their environment and as a result their behaviour changes. These changes can often be mistaken as another symptom of the condition which is often not the case. For example, the person may be unintentionally physically or verbally aggressive. This can be very distressing for the person, for those caring or supporting them and their loved ones. However, with the right support and care plan changes in behaviour can often be well managed.

Sleeping patterns

Some people living with dementia experience problems with sleep. They might sleep during the day, be unable to sleep at night or wake up often throughout the night. This pattern of distressed behaviour is known as 'sundowning' as it typically occurs in the late afternoon or early evening. They may feel disorientated, or try to get dressed and walk around. These disturbances can affect their quality of life and the people caring for them.¹

Sometimes, dementia-like symptoms can have other causes, such as a chest or urinary infection, dehydration, side-effects of medication, depression, stress or vitamin deficiencies.

If you notice any signs or symptoms you should gently encourage the person to approach their GP or seek further support from an appropriate organisation. The assessment for possible dementia is not a single step but a process that takes time. It consists of various stages and tests and ends with sharing of the diagnosis. For the person and those close to them this is often an uncertain, anxious and emotional journey.

¹ (Source: Alzheimer's Society)

Causes of dementia

When somebody develops a dementia it is natural to ask why. It is not usually possible to say for certain, although a doctor may be able to say which factor(s) might have contributed to it. In most cases a mixture of risk factors, potentially avoidable and not, will be responsible.

Advice for carers

RMBC Care Co. operates a number of care homes across England and Wales. All Homes can support people with a dementia and services include a range of support from permanent placements to short stays and respite care. To find out more information visit; <https://rmbi.org.uk/our-homes/>

Find out more

The following list is a small selection of the wide range of organisations which publish information on Dementia. *The MCF does not endorse or recommend any of the organisations listed.*

- **Alzheimer's Society**
A care and research charity for people with dementia and their carers.
0333 150 3456
www.alzheimers.org.uk
- **Local Dementia Action Alliance**
A group of people who have come together to create a dementia friendly community (DFC).
www.dementiaaction.org.uk/
- **Independent Age**
Impartial advice on a range of issues such as care and support, money, health and mobility. 0800 319 6789
www.independentage.org.uk
- **Social Services**
Local social services can help with personal care and day-to-day activities after carrying out a needs assessment.

Other information

Masonic Charitable Foundation

The MCF provides grants and support for Freemasons and their family members. A wide range of help is available for daily living costs; health, care and wellbeing; and education-related costs for children and young people.

Call 0800 035 60 90 or visit www.mcf.org.uk

MCF Factsheets

You may also be interested in the following factsheets:

- **Alternative Sources of Support**
- **Respite Care**

Scan the QR code below or visit mcf.org.uk/resources/almoner-resources



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The information contained in this factsheet is intended for general guidance only and does not constitute advice.

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