

Caring for someone with dementia

BE PATIENT: There are little things everyone can do to help someone with dementia. Giving a person time to find their words if they are having problems speaking to someone is one. Another is giving someone in a queue a bit more time.



TALK TO ME: Not knowing what to say to someone with dementia can stop people talking to them. This can be hurtful. So, don't be afraid. Give it a go and keep on talking!



USE KIND WORDS: People often joke about dementia. They forget it is a fatal condition. Individuals often face social isolation because negative word can add to the challenge of living with dementia. Be kind!



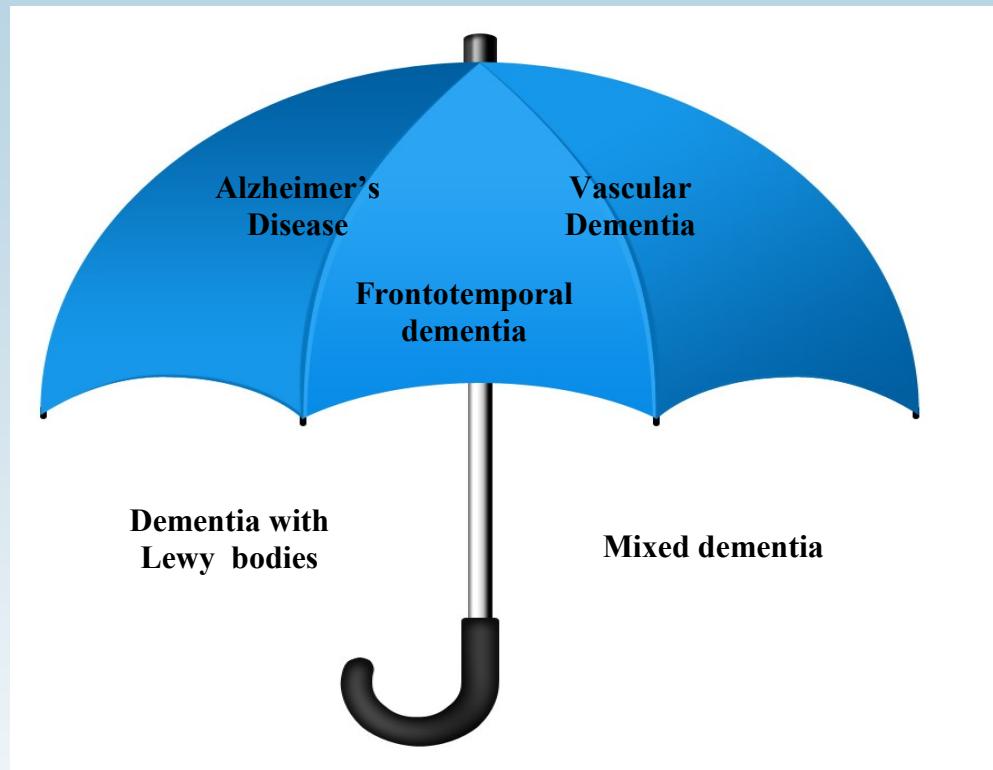
BE A FRIEND: Social contact can help slow down the progress of dementia. Keep in touch. The support of friends and family helps someone with dementia stay connected and part of their community. Show your support by becoming a 'Dementia Friend'.



The following organisations provide information, support and care services to people affected by dementia as well as their families and carers.

Age UK Oxfordshire (01865 410 210)
Alzheimer's Society (0300 222 1122)
Young Dementia UK (01865 794 311)

DEMENTIA



Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a range of progressive conditions that affect the brain. There are over 200 types of dementia, but the most common are: Alzheimer's disease, Vascular dementia, Dementia with lewy bodies, Frontotemporal dementia and Mixed dementia (more than one type of dementia).

Symptoms

Difficulties with thinking: Problems concentrating and making decisions.

Confusion: Appearing confused about time and place.

Memory loss/recognition: Difficulty recalling things that have happened recently and recognising familiar faces. Repeating things during a conversation. Relatives might notice the person seems increasingly forgetful (misplacing things regularly).

There are many reasons why people become forgetful. Some medicines and drugs can affect memory, for example. Depression, anxiety, vitamin deficiency and thyroid problems can also cause forgetfulness, so it's important to get the right diagnosis.

Changes in mood: Becoming withdrawn and unusually anxious, frightened, sad or irritable.

Language difficulties: Being unable to understand instructions or to follow the logic of moderately complex sentences. He or she may not understand their own sentences, and have difficulty forming words into thoughts.

Risk factors

Age is the strongest risk factor for dementia. After the age of 65 the prevalence of dementia doubles every 5 years. It is, however also possible to develop dementia earlier (**young-onset dementia**).

Lifestyle factors can affect the development of dementia. These include: physical inactivity, smoking, an unhealthy diet and excessive alcohol intake.

Genetics: The role of genes in the development of dementia is not quite fully understood. Some research has shown that having a close relative with Alzheimer's disease only increases your risk slightly than someone with no family history.

Medical conditions: Cardiovascular risk factors (e.g. high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes) that damage the heart, arteries or blood circulation can all affect dementia risk. Having cardiovascular disease or type 2 diabetes increases dementia risk by up to TWO times.

How you can reduce your risk

Engage in regular moderate physical activity (5 times a week for 30 minutes). This may include activities such as swimming, cycling or brisk walking. It is not necessary that you go to a gym, you could join a walking group or go dancing with friends or cycle to work. Smartphone apps are a good way to see how active you have been. Evidence suggests exercise may directly benefit brain cells by increasing blood and oxygen flow to the brain.

Stop smoking- Smoking has an harmful effect on the blood vessels in the brain, as well as the heart, lungs and vascular system. It is better to stop smoking sooner, but it is never too late to quit.

Eat a healthy balanced diet- What you eat may have its greatest impact on brain health through its effect on heart health. Current evidence suggest that a Mediterranean diet may help protect the brain and reduce your dementia risk. This diet include relatively little red meat and emphasises whole grain, vegetables, fruits, olive oil and fish. To eat healthily limit sugary treats and keep an eye on your salt intake.

Take control of your health- Managing your health can reduce your dementia risk. If you are invited for a NHS health check make sure you go. If you are already living with a long-term condition (e.g. Diabetes or heart disease) its important to keep this under control.

Keep to a healthy weight- This will reduce your risk of stroke, type 2 diabetes and heart disease and therefore probably dementia. A good starting point is to follow the advice on healthy eating and physical activity. Keep a diary of your food intake and physical activity levels. Visit the NHS live well pages for ideas, such as eating smaller portions at mealtime. You could also consider joining a weight loss group.