

- Occupational therapists can advise on practical aids and safety. For example, they can arrange for handrails to be fitted in the bathroom.
- Day centres provide activities suitable for people with dementia, and a chance to socialise.
- Respite care in a residential or nursing home may be available to give the family a break.
- Other services may be available such as laundry services and meals on wheels.

### Money and legal matters

People with dementia become gradually less able to manage their own affairs. Seek advice on how to help and how to avoid problems in the future. There is a range of benefits that help the person with dementia and their carer. You can contact your local Benefits Agency, Citizen's Advice Bureau or the Dementia Helpline for information.

### More information

Call the Dementia Helpline on freephone 0800 808 3000 to talk things over or to ask for our free information pack. The Helpline is currently only available in English.

Alzheimer Scotland - Action on Dementia exists to help people with dementia and their carers. Ask the Dementia Helpline for your local contact.



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Alzheimer Scotland  
 Action on Dementia



## What is Dementia?

Dementia is the progressive loss of the powers of the brain. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease, but many other conditions can also cause dementia. In Scotland, over 61,000 people have dementia. It is most common in older people but can affect people in their 40s, or 50s or even younger. 60% of people with dementia live at home. Some live alone and some with family or friends who care for them.

Despite much research, there is still no cure for dementia. The good news is that treatments are becoming available which may help the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease in some people.

## What are the symptoms?

Every person with dementia is different. How their illness affects them depends on which areas of their brain are most damaged. Memory loss is the most common symptom of dementia. It is important to remember that everyone forgets things sometimes. Most people's memory gets worse as they get older. But when someone has dementia, they may forget the names of family members, not just of strangers. They may repeat the same question again and again and not know they are doing it.

People with dementia lose their sense of time. They may lose track of the time of day or even which day it is. They may lose track of where they are, and get lost even in a familiar place. They may fail to recognise people they know well.

People with dementia are often confused. Their ability to think, to reason and to calculate can all be damaged. They may make odd decisions and find it hard to solve problems. Handling money may become difficult. They find it harder to work out their change or lose their sense of the value of money.

Dementia can also cause personality changes. Someone who was active and energetic may become listless. Someone pleasant and well-mannered may become rude and aggressive. These changes can be particularly distressing to relatives and friends as they lose the person they know.

Gradually, over a period of years, most functions of the brain will be affected. Eventually, people with dementia will probably need help with even simple daily activities, such as dressing, eating or going to the toilet. At this stage, caring can be a 24 hour per day responsibility - far too much for one person to cope with.

## Don't try to manage alone

Don't take on all the work and responsibility by yourself. If you do too much you may damage your own health and not be able to care at all.

Other people can help you. Explain to members of your family, friends and neighbours about dementia. Ask them if they can help. You can also get help from the services listed below.

If you have difficulties with English ask if an interpreting service is available.

## Health services

The doctor is the first person to contact. Make sure the person with dementia has a proper diagnosis. You can ask for a referral to a specialist. Tell the doctor about any changes in the person's condition. The doctor can also refer you to other health services:

- District nurses provide some nursing care at home. They can help with incontinence or any problems going to the toilet.
- Health visitors advise on general health.
- Community psychiatric nurses give practical help and advice on mental health. They can help you find ways of coping with difficult behaviour.

## Social services

Contact your local social work department. Ask for a community care assessment for the person with dementia. The carer can have an assessment too. The social worker can assess your needs and arrange the services that would help. There is no charge for an assessment, but there may be charges for services depending on the person's income.

- Home care services assist with personal care such as washing and dressing.
- Home support services can help at home and also spend some time with the person with dementia so the carer can be free to go out.