



## Dementia and voting – January 2024

Just because you have a diagnosis of dementia does not mean that you are not able to vote. Voting is a legally protected human right. As long as you can clearly make your preference known you should be supported to do so. Getting support may sound complicated, but it would depend on the individual circumstances, as many of us have voted in elections since we were 18 and know how to vote and we may have voted for the same party or person for many, many years. It may be more difficult with Local Government Elections, as this is a totally new system that ranks candidates in order of preference.

With a little support it may be possible to continue to vote for many years after a diagnosis of dementia.

### The main thing to note is...

No one has the right to tell you how to vote. You should feel free to vote for the party or person you choose. Even if this is different from the way you have voted in the past. It is your vote!

### How to access your right to vote

You need to be registered to vote. You can do this online or by returning a paper copy. To be added to the register you must be aged 14 or over in Scotland.

You must also be one of the following:

- A British citizen.
- An Irish or EU citizen living in the UK.
- A Commonwealth citizen who has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need permission.
- A citizen of another country living in Scotland or Wales who has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need permission.

You can vote when you are 18 or over. If you live in Scotland you can [vote in some elections](#) when you are 16 or over. You normally only need to register once – not for every election. You'll need to register again if you've changed your name, address or nationality. You can register online or using a paper copy – visit [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

You can also choose to not be on the open register, which anyone can ask to see. Political parties have access to all voters' details whether you are on the open register or not.

There's a different process to [register anonymously](#), for example if you're concerned about your safety or the safety of someone in your household.

### Ways to vote in elections and referendums

You can vote in three ways for any election or referendum in the UK.

- In person – going to your local polling station.
- By proxy – when someone else can go and vote on your behalf at your local polling station.
- By post – you can apply to vote by post, known as a postal vote.

No one can fill in a ballot form for you unless they are your appointed proxy. With a little support and understanding people can continue to vote for many years after a diagnosis of dementia.

## In person voting

Many people can continue to vote in person.

If the time comes when you need a little extra support with the voting process you can ask for help from the presiding officer at your polling station or from a companion, you can ask a staff member at the polling station when you arrive. Polling stations are open from 7am - 10pm on the day of the election or referendum.

## By proxy

Many people appoint a proxy vote when they cannot vote in person, but you can only apply under certain circumstances including:

- Being away on polling day.
- Having a medical issue or disability.
- Being unable to vote in person because of work or military service.

Your proxy should be someone you trust to vote on your behalf. You'll need to tell them which candidate or referendum outcome you want to vote for. This needs to be done at least 6 days before the date of the election or referendum, although you can apply for an emergency proxy vote. A proxy vote can be put in place for a specific time, event, or permanently, but it needs to be someone who is eligible to vote and can vote on the date of the election or referendum. Your polling card will say that you have a proxy vote in place and will also have the details of the polling station.

You can only apply for a [Proxy Vote using a paper form](#). In an emergency you can apply for a Proxy Vote on the day of voting up until 5pm. Contact your local [Electoral Registration Office](#) on Proxy Voting, as the form will need to be sent to them.

## Postal votes

Many people vote by postal vote to allow them the time to be able to fill in their ballot paper without having to go to their polling station. You do not need to have a reason to apply for a postal vote however you need to apply by filling out a paper form and you can [download the application to vote by post online](#).

You will still receive a polling card that will state that you have requested a postal vote and when you should expect to receive it by. The form will arrive after the polling card and needs to be returned by 10pm on the date of the election. You can hand it into any polling station in your local authority area if you have not posted before the day of the election.

If you are unable to sign the form, but able to fill in the ballot paper you can apply for a waiver of the signature. You will need to contact your local election officer's office.

## Types of elections

### General elections

A general election is to create the UK parliament, based in the Houses of Parliament in Westminster in London. The longest a UK parliament can be in place for is five years from the day it first sits.

The government of the day can decide when to call a general election, with permission of the monarch, and the election itself must be held 25 days later. General elections can be held on any day of the week but have normally been held on a Thursday since 1935.

The voting system is a simple. The political party that gains the majority will form the new government. If a clear majority is not achieved there will be attempts to form a coalition government, where two or more parties will join together to create a majority. If this is not possible another general election would need to be called.

You must be 18 or over to vote in a general election.

Voters in Scotland now need to show photo ID to vote at polling places in general elections. This also applies to by elections and recall petitions. Voters in Scotland will not need to show ID at Scottish Parliament elections or at council elections.

You can use photo ID such as your passport, driving licence, blue badge or older person's bus pass. The link below has a full list of acceptable forms of ID. Don't worry if your photo ID has expired, you can still use it if it looks like you.

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id)

If you don't have accepted photo ID, you can apply for a free voter ID document, which is known as a Voter Authority Certificate. Use the link below or you can also apply by post.

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/applying-a-voter-authority-certificate](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/applying-a-voter-authority-certificate)

You do not need to show ID if you use a postal vote. If you use a proxy vote, someone voting on your behalf, they will need to take their own ID. They do not have to show your ID.

### Scottish Parliament elections

There is a devolved parliament for Scotland, which is based in Holyrood in Edinburgh. Scottish Parliament elections are held every four years, and like a general election are normally held on a Thursday. Recently the timing had been changed to allow for council elections, and a general election.

Unlike the UK Government, the Scottish voting system is designed so it is very difficult to have an overall majority so coalition governments are more likely. The idea is to better reflect the distribution of votes each party received.

You cast two votes during an election for the Scottish Parliament. Firstly, there is a constituency vote to elect a person to be your constituency member, following the 'first past the post system'.

In the second, you vote for a party (or an independent candidate if any are standing). These regional MSP's are then elected using a formula. This is achieved by a constituency system like the 'first past the post' system used at a general election and an additional proportional representation vote for each voter. This allows people to vote for a party rather than a candidate and a list of candidates will be created to allow for these proportional representation roles to be filled.

All elections in Scotland allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote. This change was introduced in 2015.

### Scottish local government elections

Like the Scottish parliament elections these should be held every four years. They are held so that they do not fall in the same year as a Scottish Parliament election. Areas are under local authorities which are broken down into 'wards'. Each ward has more than one Councillor, depending on how many voters are in each ward, and they may be from different political parties.

Scottish Local Government Elections are conducted under the 'Single Transferable Vote' (STV) electoral system. This means you should rank the candidates in order of your preference.

You should number the candidates in the order of your choice:

- Put the number 1 in the box next to the name of the candidate who is your **first** choice.
- 2 in the box next to your **second** choice.
- 3 in the box next to your **third** choice and so on.
- You can make as many, or as few, choices as you wish.

### Other voting

There may be other votes called, for example a referendum, that require a national vote. These tend to concern a single issue and are formed of a yes or no answer or other relevant options.