

What is dementia?

memory • advice • thinking
brain • sensory • information
health • awareness • symptoms
disease • space • medicine
clinic • names

blood
support
heart

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 and promote their rights and interests.

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people enjoy better later lives.

We have three strategic aims:



We help older people to be as well as they can be



We promote a positive view of ageing and later life



We 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.

Our **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.



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



Visit agescotland.org.uk
to find out more.

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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 is becoming more so as people are living longer.

Types of dementia

There are thought to be over 200 different types of dementia. Some types are more common than others.

- Dementia caused by **Alzheimer's disease** is the most common type of dementia, accounting for around two thirds of cases. Two specific types of protein called amyloid and tau build up in the brain cells, and the cells become damaged.
- **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 a less common type of dementia. It is caused by a build-up of certain proteins in the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain. The cells and their connections with the rest of the brain are damaged.
- **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.

- **Posterior Cortical Atrophy** is a rare form of dementia that is most often linked to the same proteins present in Alzheimer's disease. In PCA, brain cells at the back (posterior) of the brain are damaged. This part of the brain is vital for judging space and distance, and for making sense of what we see.
- **Parkinson's disease 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.
- **HIV-associated dementia** now occurs very rarely in the UK. This is because HIV medications can usually keep the virus to very low levels in the body. However, many people with HIV experience mild problems with their memory and thinking. This is called HIV-associated neurocognitive disorder (HAND). Symptoms normally remain stable and do not progress to dementia.
- **Alcohol-related brain damage** has symptoms similar to dementia. Unlike dementia it does not always progress and symptoms can sometimes improve if the person is given the right support. However, heavy drinking is also a risk factor for developing dementia. Risk factors are explained in the next section.



Age Scotland runs free workshops covering topics such as understanding dementia, prevention and living well with dementia. Call the **Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222** for more information.**

Risk factors

Risk factors are things that put us at a higher risk of developing a condition. Some of our personal risk factors cannot be changed but we have some control over others. Age is the biggest risk factor for dementia. The risk of dementia goes up with age, particularly for those over 65.

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

More women than men develop Alzheimer's disease, but the reasons for this are still not completely clear. It is thought to be partly due to women living longer on average than men. However, other forms of dementia seem to be equally common in men and women.

It is thought that severe or repeated head injury may increase the risk of developing dementia.

Reducing your risk

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 drinking less alcohol can help as well.

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



Signs and symptoms

Dementia affects everyone differently, but common symptoms in the early stages of dementia include:

- difficulties with short-term memory – losing things, or forgetting the names of people or everyday objects
- language difficulties and struggling to follow conversations
- problems with spatial awareness – difficulty parking, crossing roads, and 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 visual perception – 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 combinations of symptoms. They also progress in different ways. For example, Alzheimer's disease tends to progress steadily and gradually. In contrast, the symptoms of vascular dementia tend to remain stable for long periods and get worse suddenly, followed by another period of no change.

Other causes of memory loss

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, and a lot of other things can also affect memory and thinking:

Physical health problems including stroke, infections, thyroid problems, nutritional deficiencies and diabetes. Other things that can impact brain function include not drinking enough fluids, the side effects of some medicines, smoking, drinking alcohol heavily and not sleeping well.

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

Changes to senses as people get older can seem like memory problems. Most people find that using their senses can bring back memories, for example looking at a photograph, listening to a piece of music or smelling familiar food. Someone may be unable to recall a memory in this way because their senses are dulled.

Mild cognitive impairment is a medical diagnosis. This is given when someone has problems with memory or thinking beyond what can be expected because of normal ageing. Symptoms are usually stable, and can sometimes get better if they are related to a treatable illness, such as depression. People with mild cognitive impairment are at greater risk of developing dementia than the general population.



What if I think it's dementia?

If you are worried that you, or someone you care for, may have dementia, it is a good idea to get this checked. If someone does have dementia, a correct diagnosis at an early stage can help them get the right support to stay independent for longer and to start planning for the future.

The best place to start is talking to a GP. It will help the GP if you can give a clear description of what is worrying you. You might want to write down a list of the things you have been noticing so you remember to mention everything.

It is important to be open and honest with the GP. They should 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 could be causing the symptoms.

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

Diagnosing dementia can take some time and may involve several appointments and tests over a number of weeks or months. This can be a difficult time and you may experience a range of emotions.

i Alzheimer Scotland has a 24-hour **Dementia Helpline**. You can call them on **0800 808 3000** for information, support and advice.

What if it is dementia?

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

There are many organisations that can support you and help you plan for the future. While there is no cure for dementia, 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 helpline **0800 12 44 222**

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us on **0800 12 44 222** for a copy of our publications list or download copies of our publications from our website at **www.agescotland.org.uk**.

Alzheimer Scotland

Alzheimer Scotland provides an extensive range of support services and information to people living with dementia, their families, friends and carers.

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

www.alzscot.org



Would you like to learn more?

Age Scotland runs free workshops covering topics such as understanding dementia, prevention and living well with dementia.

**Call the [Age Scotland helpline](#) on
0800 12 44 222 for more information.**

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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 which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information we provide is free and impartial. It helps older people access their rights and entitlements and can be life changing.

We are also a lifeline for older people who are feeling lonely and isolated. You can help us to support older people who need us most.

Together, we can make a difference.



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 **AGESCOTGIVE** to **70085** to donate £5*
- ▶ Complete the **donation form** and return by Freepost



Fundraise

Whether it's having a bake sale or running a marathon, 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 us to continue being there for 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

Please donate today



Complete the form and return to RSBS-KEHC-GBBC, Age Scotland, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

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I am a UK tax payer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

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Keeping in touch

We will stay in contact by post unless you ask us not to. We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure. You can change your mind at any time by emailing us on contact@agescotland.org.uk or calling us on 0333 323 2400.

You can read Age Scotland's privacy policy at [age.scot/privacypolicy](https://www.agescotland.org.uk/age.scot/privacypolicy).

**Age Scotland, part of the Age Network, is an independent charity dedicated to improving the later lives of everyone on the ageing journey, within a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland.

Registration Number: 153343. Charity Number: SC010100. Registered Office: Causewayside House, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1PR.

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 which is the best place in the world to grow older.

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Let's keep in touch

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



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 at [agescot/roundup](https://www.agescotland.org.uk/agescot/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.



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