



Caring For Someone With Dementia

Information for family, carers and loved ones



This booklet gives a brief overview of how dementia can affect a person on a day-to-day basis and offers guidance and advice to the families and friends of a person living with dementia. The care team will be able to provide more specific information relating to your loved one or answer any other questions that you may have.

When a Person Develops Dementia

Dementia is a broad term used to describe a condition where there is an ongoing and generally irreversible decline of the brain and its abilities. At present, dementia is not curable. Although medication is available to slow the disease symptoms, they are not suitable for everyone.

Regardless of the type of dementia diagnosed, each person will experience their dementia differently. It will depend on many factors, including where the damage in the brain is and the character and individuality of the person.

The Two Most Common Types of Dementia

Although there are over 100 different types of dementia, residents with a diagnosis of dementia who are living in an Avery care home are most likely to have one of the more familiar forms of the disease.

Alzheimer's Disease

This is the most common type of dementia. In Alzheimer's Disease, proteins build up in the brain to form structures called plaques and tangles which lead to connections between nerve cells being lost, and consequently dying.

The progression of Alzheimer's Disease is relatively steady, with initial symptoms commonly involving memory lapses, such as misplacing items or getting lost in previously familiar places.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular Dementia is the second most common type of dementia affecting people in the UK. This type of dementia occurs when damage to brain cells is caused by a reduced blood supply to the brain, for example, a stroke. The progression of Vascular Dementia varies from person to person. Where the damage has occurred in the brain and whether the stroke was a single episode or a series of strokes all affect progression. Underlying medical conditions, for example, high blood pressure, will also impact the advancement of this type of dementia.

How Damage to the Brain can Impact on Day to Day Living

The areas of the brain that are affected and the difficulties that a person will experience as a result are dependent on the type of dementia and other factors, including the person's previous skills and abilities. For example, a person who has always had a very poor sense of direction is still likely to have a poor sense of direction, regardless of where the damage caused by dementia occurs.

Memory

Although memory difficulties are a common symptom of most types of dementia, a person's memory can be affected in different ways.

Short-term Memory

A person may be unable to 'hold on to' information and continually ask the same question despite receiving a response several times. Although this can be frustrating,

it is important to remain aware that the person is not doing it on purpose.

Altered Reality

It is common for people with more advanced dementia to experience what is regarded as an 'altered reality', where the person experiences episodes where their brain makes sense of the world based on the reality of their younger self.

For example, if a person's brain 'tells them' that they are 30, rather than 80, then they will make sense of the world based on their 30-year old self.

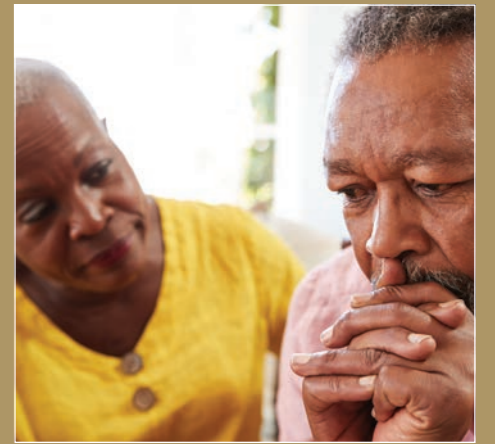
Difficulties that an individual may experience include:

- Not recognising their (adult) children, as a 30-year-old person could not be the parent of children older than themselves.
- Asking for their mother, father or other (now deceased) relative as they may have been alive when the resident was 30.

It can be very painful when a person with dementia is asking for a deceased relative or if they appear not to recognise members of their family.

The care team can provide support and guidance to families to discuss how best to support a loved one and the most appropriate responses to avoid further confusing and distressing the person.

It is important for family members to know that people with dementia can often recognise and enjoy spending time with those who are significant to them, even if they cannot correctly identify individuals by name.



Visual Blind Spots

Sometimes a person's actions will indicate that they cannot 'see' objects or items before them, regardless of how good (or poor) their eyesight is. This can be due to the brain no longer processing the images that are being observed. For example, a person may be unable to locate a cup of tea in front of them without help.

Identifying Colour or Tones

A person may have difficulties identifying colours or distinguishing similar objects. Activities or conversations that do not require the person to identify or match colours correctly may be more helpful to avoid additional frustration or distress.

Co-ordination

A person with dementia may struggle in distinguishing left from right. Care should be taken not to use left/right directional instructions to avoid further confusion. Similarly, general co-ordination may be affected. For example, a person may have difficulty manipulating cutlery at mealtimes and may benefit from being offered cutlery free menu options.

Orientating within the Environment

A person with dementia can become disorientated within their environment regardless of the length of time they have lived there. For example, the person may be unable to locate the toilet or their bedroom and may need guidance and direction to avoid getting lost. Similarly, a person may not make sense of their surroundings and frequently ask where they are. Although this can

be frustrating for family members, it can be even more distressing for the person themselves.

Reading, Writing and Numbers

A person with dementia may appear to be having problems reading or making sense of written words or numbers. Care should be taken when considering the type of activities the person may want to engage with. Word-based puzzles may cause further frustration or distress, despite the person previously enjoying completing a daily crossword.

Language

A person with dementia may struggle to understand what is being said and appear to ignore others, particularly if there is a lot of background noise.

Speaking slowly, choosing different words to describe objects or items, making sentences shorter and using gestures and objects are helpful adjustments.

For example, holding a cup when asking a person if they would like a drink of tea are all approaches that may be helpful, as well as making sure that spectacles and hearing aids are worn.



Concentration and Decision Making

A person with dementia may struggle to remain focused for more than a few minutes at a time. Giving too many choices, for example, when asking if a person would like tea, coffee, juice, or water can cause a person to be overwhelmed. Offering just one or two options is usually much more helpful.

Care for Others

Sometimes, the personality of a person with dementia will appear to change radically, and they may display very unfamiliar behaviour, such as swearing or being unpleasant to others. When a person is cognitively well, the brain is usually able to regulate behaviour by filtering which thoughts are spoken out loud and which are not, which actions are carried out, and which are 'held back'.

When dementia causes damage in specific brain areas, the ability to 'screen' behaviour is lost. A person's capability to judge the right things to say and do in a particular situation may change. The care team can provide support in such situations, which can be very upsetting for families.





Life Stories

When working with people who have memory problems or other cognitive difficulties, it can sometimes be difficult for members of staff to know how to start a conversation that is about something other than the day-to-day goings-on in the care home.

Life Story work is used in memory care settings as a valuable way of helping others understand more about a person. Knowing something about a resident's life story can help team members engage with an individual in a meaningful and interesting way. It can also help the care team and family members make sense of how a person acts and reacts in situations, allowing the right level of support to be provided.

Music

Music is often an important part of a person's life story and is frequently used in dementia care as a way of engaging with a person who may no longer be able to connect with others easily. It is very helpful for a care team to understand the type of music that a person previously enjoyed so that they can ensure it is made available.

Each key worker is responsible for working with their resident in putting together their life story board, musical playlist and memory box. Each resident needs to be part of the process, as life story work is often as important as the finished items. We encourage loved ones to be involved in this work too. The care team can provide more detailed information on how life story work is used and how it helps plan care for a person with dementia and assist others in connecting with the person.

Picture Boards

Life story picture boards combine pictures or photographs of places or items that may be significant to the person with an explanation of the memories attached to these images. It is generally advisable not to include photographs of people in the picture frame. Due to memory difficulties, a person can sometimes be unable to recall names which can be distressing.

It is often more beneficial if images of recognisable places such as familiar holiday destinations and workplaces or significant items associated with hobbies such as gardening equipment or dance shoes are used. Care staff can then engage the person in more general conversations.

Memory Boards

A personal memory box complements the picture board by containing relevant and interesting items for the person. It is not advisable for items of high sentimental or monetary value to be placed in the box but instead, a combination of things that have some meaning for the person.

For example, bobbins of cotton for someone who enjoyed sewing, recipe cards for a keen baker, seed catalogues for an avid gardener or old football programmes are very helpful for an individual to engage with and provide an opportunity for staff to chat with a resident.

Further Useful Information

For more information or to find out more about some of the less common forms of dementia, the following organisations may be helpful:

The Alzheimer's Society

The Alzheimer's Society has local branches throughout the UK offering support and information.

Alzheimer's Society Helpline

Tel: 0300 222 1122

Admiral Nursing Direct Dementia Helpline

Dementia UK offers specialist practical and emotional support and advice to the families of people living with dementia.

Dementia Helpline

Tel: 0800 888 6678

Age UK

For support and advice on all aspects of older living, including health and care.
Tel: 0800 678 1174

averyhealthcare.co.uk
enquiries@averyhealthcare.co.uk
For further details please telephone 0800 012 9113

