

Caring for someone with dementia

If you are caring for a person with dementia you will want to ensure that they are always treated with respect and dignity. They are a unique and valuable human being.

A person with dementia, whose mental abilities are declining, is likely to feel vulnerable and in need of reassurance and support. It is important that those around them do everything they can to help them to retain their sense of identity and their feeling of self worth. Such people will need to remember that:

- Each person with dementia is a unique individual with their own very different experiences of life, their own needs and feelings and their own likes and dislikes.
- Although there are symptoms of dementia which are common to everyone, each person will be affected by their dementia in a different way.
- Everyone reacts to the experience of dementia in an individual way. The experience means different things to different people.

Those caring for a person with dementia will need to take account of their abilities, interests and preferences. They need to be aware that these things may change as

the dementia progresses. They should be prepared to respond in a flexible and sensitive way.

The person with dementia needs to feel respected and valued for what they are now, as well as for who they were in the past. It helps if those caring are:

- Flexible and tolerant.
- Can make time to listen and have a chat and enjoy being with the person.
- Can show affection as appropriate.

This leaflet was compiled with information from the Alzheimer's Society. For more information call the Alzheimer's Helpline 0845 300 0336

Four Seasons Health Care Limited
Emerson Court, Alderley Road,
Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 1NX
Tel: 01625 417800
Fax: 01625 417827
E-mail: fourseasons@fshc.co.uk
Website: www.fshc.co.uk

Advice on Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease



FOUR SEASONS
HEALTH CARE

Caring
for you... personally, practically and professionally

What is dementia?

If you, or a friend or relative, have been diagnosed with dementia you may be feeling anxious or confused.

You may not know what dementia is. This information leaflet should help answer some of your questions.

The term 'dementia' is used to describe the symptoms that occur when the brain is affected by specific diseases and conditions. These include Alzheimer's disease and strokes.

Dementia is progressive - which means the symptoms will gradually get worse. How fast dementia progresses depends on the individual. Each person is unique and will experience dementia in their own way.

Symptoms of dementia include:

- Loss of memory - for example, forgetting the way home from the shops, or being unable to remember names and places.
- Mood changes - particularly as parts of the brain that control emotion are affected by the disease. People with dementia may also feel sad, frightened or angry about what is happening to them.
- Communication problems - a decline in the ability to talk, read and write.

In the later stages of dementia the person affected will have problems carrying out everyday tasks and will become increasingly dependent on other people.

Who gets dementia?

There are about 750,000 people in the UK with dementia.

- Dementia mainly affects older people.
- Both men and women get dementia.
- Scientists are investigating the genetic background to dementia. It does appear that in a few rare cases the diseases that cause dementia can be inherited.

How is Alzheimer's disease diagnosed?

It is important not to become over-concerned at minor mental slips, but early and accurate diagnosis is important to clarify whether a treatable condition is causing symptoms, and to provide the best possible care.

A health professional records the pattern of symptoms, and uses simple tests to see what someone remembers and if they can hold simple information in their memory.

These can be repeated after a few months to measure change. Where dementia is suspected, brain scans can show chemical activity and whether areas of the brain are shrinking.

Can dementia be prevented?

At present we are not sure what causes most of the diseases that lead to dementia.

However, the evidence seems to indicate that a healthy diet and lifestyle may protect against dementia. In particular, not smoking, exercising regularly, avoiding fatty foods and keeping mentally active into old age may help prevent us from developing vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

How can I tell if I have dementia?

Many people fear they have dementia, particularly if they think their memory is getting worse.

Becoming forgetful does not necessarily mean that you have dementia. Memory loss can be an effect of ageing. It can also be a sign of stress or depression. In rare cases dementia-like symptoms can be caused by vitamin deficiencies and/or a brain tumour.

If you are worried about yourself, or someone close to you, it is worth discussing your concerns with your GP.