

# What is Dementia?

Dementia is not something that just happens to people as they get older; it is caused by different diseases that stop a person's brain from working properly. When a person has one of these diseases, they may have problems with their thinking, memory and speaking. They might say or do things that seem strange to others and find it harder to do everyday things. They may not seem like the person they used to be. When these problems get worse over time, doctors may use the word dementia to describe them. [Alzheimer's Research UK](#) state that almost 1 million people in the UK live with dementia.

People over 75 are much more likely to get dementia, but it can affect younger people too. In most cases, it is not known why a person may get dementia while someone else may not. There are currently no medicines to cure dementia.

## Information and Support

Information and advice is available on the [Oldham Council Website](#). [Age UK Oldham](#) provide a [Dementia Support and Specialist Carers Assessment Service](#). Oldham Council provide suggestions for [Dementia Friendly Days Out](#). [Dementia UK](#) and [Alzheimer's Society](#) have online information and guidance.

Practitioners can become a Dementia Friend by watching a short video or attending a [session](#). The person's GP practice can also support.

## Environment

NHS England state that a dementia-friendly environment reduces confusion and enhances independence. Practitioners should aim to reduce potential causes of stress. People living with dementia may struggle to distinguish objects when they blend into their surroundings. For example, handrails that are the same colour as the wall. Shiny floors may appear wet or unsafe, and shadows can be mistaken for steps or changes in floor height. Try to reduce glare, shadows and reflections. Maximize natural, bright and even light as this can help to avoid confusion and reduce the risk of falls. Familiar items can also become harder to recognise. The ability to visually identify something, such as a toilet, and the ability to recall its purpose may become disconnected, meaning the person may not instantly link what they see with how to use it. Keep the environment calm, avoiding potential distractions. Reduce excess noise. Laminate or vinyl flooring can be very noisy. Carpets, cushions and curtains absorb background noise. Ensure pathways and routes are clear and easy to navigate.

# Symptoms and Stages

Dementia is not a disease itself. It's a collection of symptoms that result from damage to the brain caused by different diseases, such as Alzheimer's. These symptoms vary according to the part of the brain that is damaged. Some common early symptoms that may appear some time before a diagnosis of dementia include memory loss; difficulty concentrating; struggling with activities of daily living, being confused about time and place; and changes in moods and behaviours. Dementia is progressive. Signs and symptoms may be relatively mild at first, but they get worse with time. Middle stage dementia is when symptoms become more severe and wide-ranging. The person starts to need help with more basic tasks. Late stage dementia is when a person starts to need more constant care, often provided by professional carers.

## Diagnosis

The [Alzheimer's Society](#) found 60% of people with dementia wish they had received a diagnosis earlier. Early diagnosis helps people to access the right support to live as well as possible, including treatments to help with symptoms; information to help them and others understand the changes they are experiencing; and any benefits or legal protection they may be entitled to. Speaking to the GP is the starting point.

## Distressed Behaviour

The STOP approach describes key ways to help you listen and watch, and understanding distressed or unusual behaviour in people with dementia who may be communicating unmet needs like pain, fear or discomfort. **See:** Attempt to see the world from the person's viewpoint. Behaviour is likely an attempt to communicate a need or to feel safe.

**Think:** Be aware of your emotion; remain calm and reflect on what you know about the person's history and personality. **Observe** and ask what the person is trying to communicate. **Patience and Persistence:** This process requires calm persistence to reduce distress. If the person becomes significantly upset or distressed, ask if they have anyone who can help. If you are concerned for their welfare, call 999.



**Supporting People Who Have Dementia**

## Communication

The Equality Act states all agencies must take steps to remove barriers people face due to disability including those with dementia. People with dementia may feel anxious, frustrated or isolated. How practitioners approach supporting someone can make a big difference in how they feel. Show care and empathy, treat the person as an individual, actively listen, validate any feelings and offer reassurance if they seem anxious or upset. Speak clearly and slowly, using short sentences. Make eye contact when they are talking. Give them time to digest the information being shared with them and to respond, because they may feel pressured if you try to speed up responses. Use other ways to communicate such as rephrasing questions because they cannot answer in the way they used to.

Website: [www.OldhamSafeguarding.org](http://www.OldhamSafeguarding.org)

Email: [OldhamSafeguardingAdultsBoard@Oldham.gov.uk](mailto:OldhamSafeguardingAdultsBoard@Oldham.gov.uk)

