

# Defining Dementia

## A Practical Guide



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# WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

## Dementia is

A condition in which there is a gradual loss of brain function (Royal College of psychiatrists)

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEMENTIA

### Alzheimer's Disease

This is the most common form of dementia. It was named after Alois Alzheimer, the German doctor who first recognised and described the disease. The brain cells of people with Alzheimer's do not function properly because 'plaques' develop around them and the cells can no longer communicate efficiently with each other. The symptoms develop slowly (scils)

### Vascular Dementia

The vascular system is the network of veins and arteries that carry blood around the body. If the vascular network within the brain is not functioning properly parts of the brain will be deprived of blood and oxygen and affected brain cells will die. There are two main types:

- Single infarct dementia – may be caused by a stroke
- Multi-infarct dementia – may be caused by a series of small strokes (scils)

### Lewy-body Dementia

Named after the doctor who identified them in 1912 (Frederich Lewy). They are tiny protein deposits found in the nerve cells, they disrupt the normal processes of the brain and cause dementia. This is more likely to affect people over 65.

## Fronto-temporal lobe dementia (Picks disease)

Named after Arnold Pick who first identified the disease in 1892, when examining the brain of a man who died from dementia and progressive speech difficulties, caused by damage to the frontal and temporal areas of the brain which control personality, behaviour, emotional reactions and language skills. This is more likely to affect people under the age of 65.

### Rarer causes of dementia:

- Creutzfeldt – Jakob disease (CJD)
- Korsakoffs syndrome – Alcohol related Dementia
- HIV/AIDS
- Multiple sclerosis
- Motor neurone disease
- Parkinson’s disease
- Huntington’s disease
- Downs Syndrome Dementia



# STATISTICS

There are over 800,000 people with dementia in the UK.

## Dementia affects:

AGE IN YEARS	PREVALENCE
40-64	1 in 1400
65-69	1 in 100
70-79	1 in 25
80+	1 in 6

## Dementia affects:

- 5% of over 65's in the UK
- 20% of over 80's in the UK
- 1 person in a 1000 under the age of 65
- 1/3rd of people over 95

## Other statistics:

- Two thirds of people are women
- There are over 11,500 people from black and minority ethnic groups with Dementia in the UK
- 64% of people living in care homes have a form of Dementia

Source: The Alzheimer's Society, Scils.

# FACTORS

Dementia develops when brain cells involved with mental abilities are damaged.

The most common causes of dementia is:

- Alzheimer's Disease
- Vascular Disease

Many different diseases and conditions cause the damage and different symptoms are associated with each of them. These are some of the potential risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and Vascular dementia (source scils, Alzheimer's Society, e-learning).



## MAIN SYMPTOMS

The main symptoms are:

1. Memory problems
  - a). Mild - Difficulty remembering recent events
  - b). Moderate - Getting lost and looking for people or places from the past
  - c). Severe - Difficulty recognising close family and friends, frequently repeating words, movements or having little speech or movement
2. Cognitive difficulties - loss of thinking skills and ability to function in day to day living
3. Disorientation - confusion
4. Changes in behaviour

## OTHER CONDITIONS THAT MAY BE MISTAKEN FOR DEMENTIA

Other conditions that might be mistaken for Dementia:

- **Minimal Cognitive Impairment (MCI)** - mild problems with memory but no significant difficult in managing their daily living, risk of Dementia, and some may be in early stages of Dementia. Mild memory problems could be the result of stress, anxiety, depression, physical illness or side effects of medication.
- **Delirium (toxic confusion)** - develops quickly over hours, days. Symptoms can look very similar to Dementia symptoms. A person with Delirium becomes disorientated and muddled in their thinking and speech. They may have hallucinations or delusions. Changes are temporary, once the cause is treated the person improves. Delirium could be caused by Urinary Tract Infection. People can have Delirium and Dementia.

- **Depression** - Can sometimes present like Dementia, in addition to feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and difficulties with concentration, memory and decision making. They could be agitated, restless, thinking and actions may slow down, and they withdraw from others and are less motivated with daily living tasks. Sometimes a person may have both Depression and Dementia. Depression can be treated even when a person has Dementia.

### Other conditions/causes not related to dementia could be:

- Folate deficiency
- Hypothyroidism
- Vitamin B12 deficiency
- Dehydration
- Lung, heart conditions that prevent the normal supply of blood and oxygen to the brain
- Side-effects of some medications
- Infections
- Loneliness/depression
- Lack of nutrition
- Hormonal imbalance
- Change of surroundings



## WHAT PEOPLE CAN EXPERIENCE

- A loss of control over their lives
- Less able to function as they used to and to do things for themselves
- Having difficulties communicating their physical and emotional needs
- Having difficulties making decisions, resulting in feeling that other people control many aspects of their lives
- Relationships and their role with family and friends may change and may need help from partners/family with intimate tasks

## DIAGNOSING DEMENTIA

Different information needs to be put together for a diagnosis to take place. This should include:

- Listening to the person's account of changes in their memory, abilities or mood
- Getting information from other significant people in the person's life
- Finding out if there is anything else causing the symptoms e.g depression, delirium
- Using a standardised assessment tool to measure areas of change and difficulty
- Referral to a specialist for assessment and brain scans

## REFERENCES

NHS Choices website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/pages/introduction.aspx>

Alzheimer's Society website:

<http://www.alzheimers.org.uk>

On line talking point, an online forum for discussions about dementia related issues:

<http://alzheimers.org.uk>

Age UK:

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Scils website (Social Care Information & learning Services):

[www.scils.co.uk](http://www.scils.co.uk)

Royal college of psychiatrics:

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)

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