

Caring For Someone With Dementia

Information for family,
carers and loved ones



Avery

Care With A Difference

This booklet has been designed to give 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 that is used to describe a condition where there is an ongoing and generally irreversible decline of the brain and its abilities. At the present time, dementia is not curable. Although medication is available to slow the symptoms of the disease, these are not suitable for everyone.

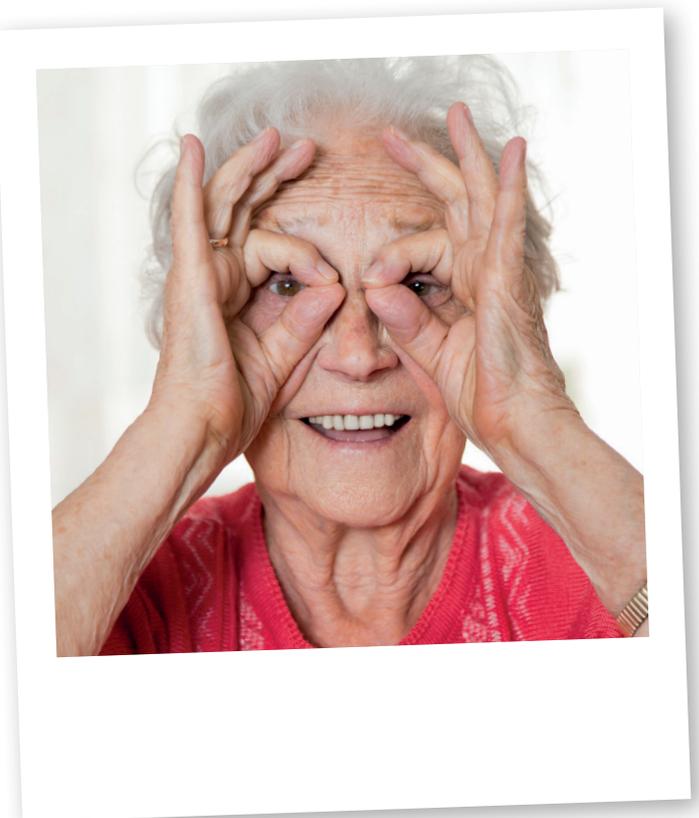
Regardless of which type of dementia is diagnosed, each person will experience their dementia differently. This will depend on many factors including where the damage in the brain is, and the character and individuality of the person.

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; for example, misplacing items or a person 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 due to a stroke.

The progression of Vascular Dementia will vary from person to person depending on whereabouts in the brain damage has occurred, whether the stroke was a single episode, or whether there have been a series of strokes. Underlying medical conditions, for example high blood pressure will also have an impact on the progression of this type of dementia.

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

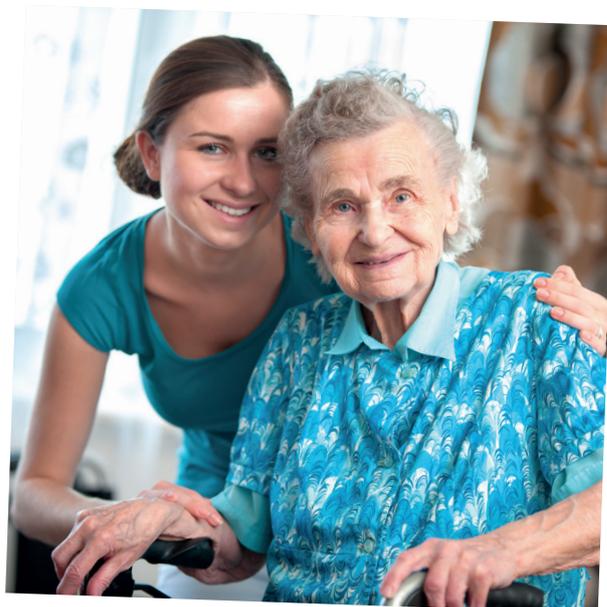
The areas of the brain that are affected, and the difficulties that a person will experience as a result are dependent on the type of dementia, as well as on other factors, including the person's previous skills and abilities. For example, a person who has always had a very poor sense of direction, is 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, so continues to ask the same question continually 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 give to avoid confusing and distressing the person further.

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

Visual Blind Spots

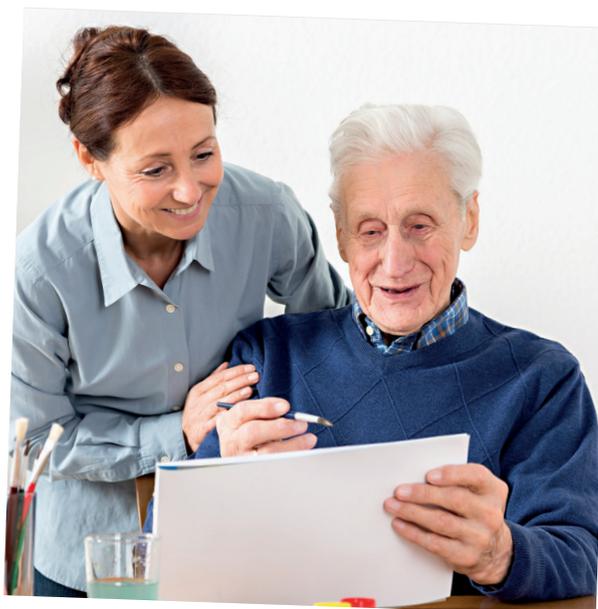
Sometimes a person's actions will indicate that they cannot 'see' objects or items that are in front of them, regardless of how good (or poor) their eye sight is. This can be due to the brain no longer being able to process the images that are being observed.

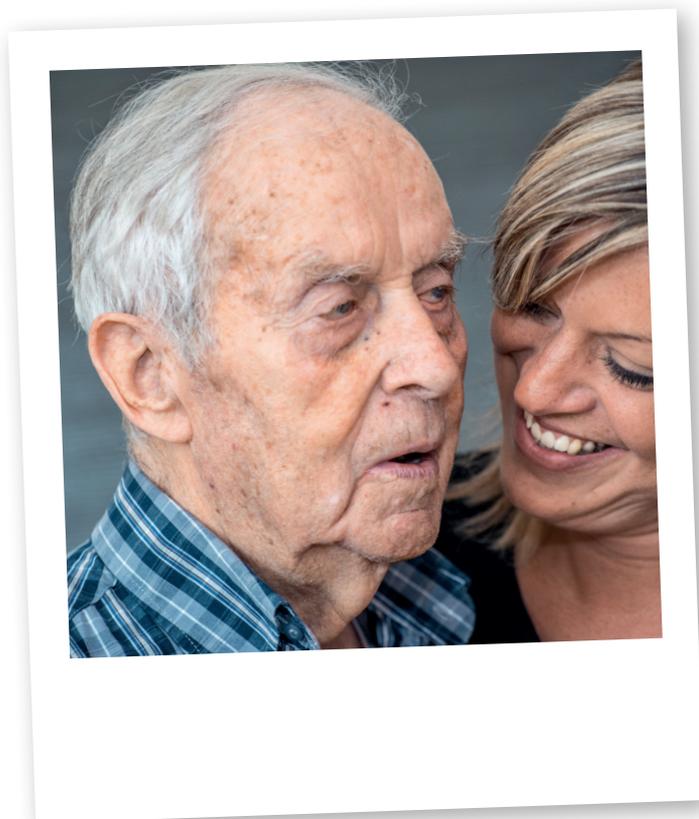
For example, a person may be unable to locate a cup of tea in front of them without help.

Identifying Colour or Tones

A person may have difficulties identifying colours or distinguishing objects that are a similar colour.

Activities or conversations that do not require the person to correctly identify or match colours may be more helpful to avoid additional frustration or distress.





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 be unable to make sense of their surroundings and may 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 that the person may want to engage with.

For example, 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 may 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.

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.

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 in managing to use cutlery at meal times and may manage more successfully with finger-friendly buffet style foods.

Orientating Within the Environment

A person with dementia can become disorientated within their environment regardless of the length of

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 behaviour that is very unfamiliar, for example 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 said out loud and which are not, and which actions are carried out, and which are 'held back'.

When dementia causes damage in certain areas of the brain, the ability to 'screen' behaviour is lost and a person's capability of judging 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.

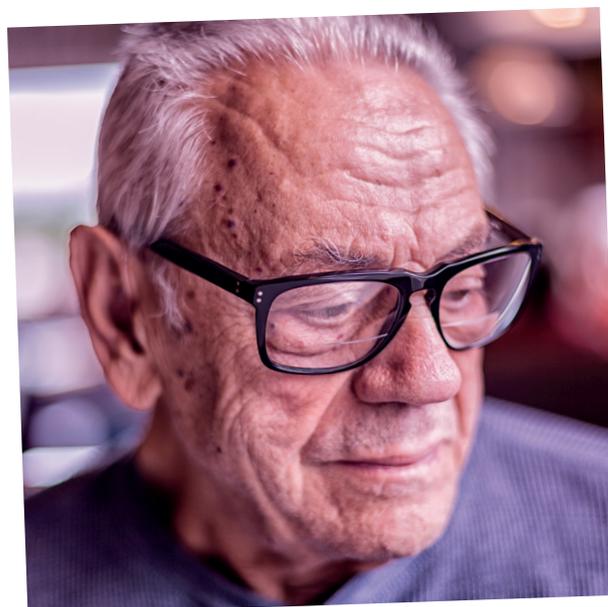
Life Story Work

Life Story work is used in memory care settings as a useful way of helping others to understand more about a person.

Knowing something of the life story of a resident can help members of the team to engage with an individual in a meaningful and interesting way.

It can also help the care team and family members to make sense of the way a person acts and reacts in situations, allowing the right level of support to be given.

The care team can provide more detailed information on how life story work is used and how it helps with planning care for a person with dementia, as well as helping others to connect with the person.



Queries or Questions

If you have any queries or questions about the care of your loved one, please contact the Home Manager who will be very happy to help.

Developed by Jo Crosland Head of Dementia Care, Avery Healthcare.

Further Information and Helpful Contact Details

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

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.

Information and Advice Line
Tel: **0800 678 1174**





Avery Group Support Centre
3 Cygnet Drive
Swan Valley
Northampton
NN4 9BS

Tel: 01604 675566
www.averyhealthcare.co.uk

