

What is Dementia?



An Easy Read Guide about dementia and how it can affect people with learning difficulties.

By York People First, April 2024.



What is Dementia?



Dementia is a word used to widely describe the effects of more than 100 conditions.

Dementia can affect the brain and change the way people act, react and think.



You can't catch dementia from someone else.

It is something that mostly affects people as they get older, but **not everybody** who develops dementia is old and some people under 65 will develop dementia.



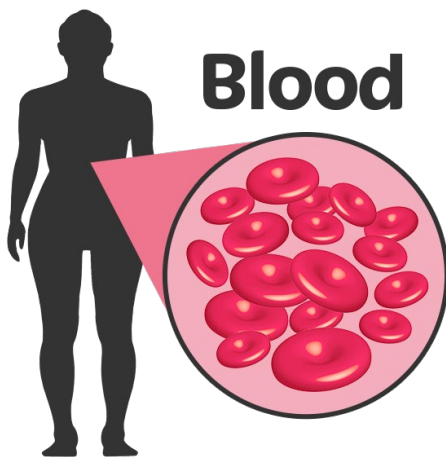
It is important to remember that **we are all different**, and dementia affects people in different ways.



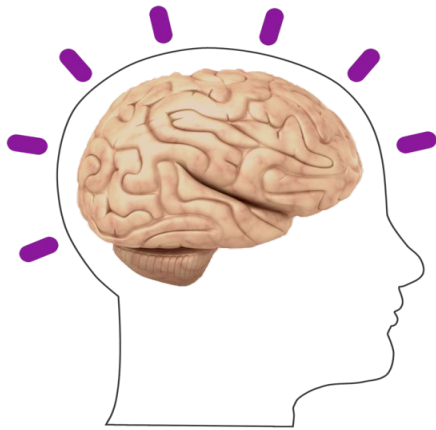
There are many different types of dementia, and each type has **different effects** on people. The most common types are:



Alzheimer's Disease - This is the most common form of dementia. It is a disease that changes the brain and the functions that it controls. It may start with confusion or problems with short-term memory.



Vascular Dementia - This type of dementia happens because of a reduced blood supply to the brain, usually due to a stroke. This often starts with concentration or memory problems or difficulty with everyday tasks.



A person with dementia **may become confused** about where they are or what they are doing. They may start to lose interest in things they have always enjoyed or start to behave or act differently.



There is no **cure for dementia**, but there are things that we can all do to live well and to support other people to live well with dementia.



Some people will need a lot of help, while others may just need a little bit of support.



There are some things we can all do to **reduce our risk** of dementia, such as eating healthy foods and keeping our brains and our bodies active.

Dementia and Learning Difficulties.



People with learning difficulties can have more of a **risk** of developing dementia.



If a person with a learning difficulties develops dementia, it **may be harder to recognise** and they may need to access different support.



Because of better hospitals, hospital staff and more support workers, people with learning difficulties are **living longer lives**.



This means it is more likely they will live to an age where **dementia** could happen.



It might take longer for doctors to **recognise the signs of dementia** in someone who has learning difficulties.



This makes it more important to be able to **know the signs of dementia**.

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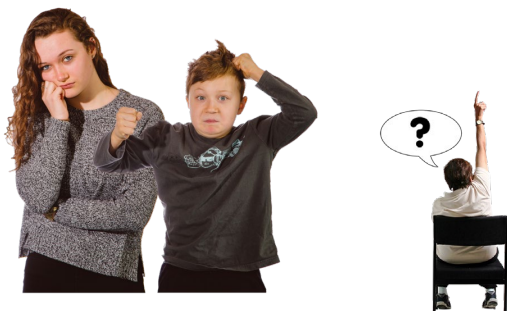


When a person with a learning difficulties **develops dementia**, they will have new needs that have to be met.



With the right care and support, it is possible for someone with dementia to have a **good life**.

How can dementia affect people with learning difficulties?



It is important to know that **not everyone with a learning difficulty will develop dementia** as they get older.



About **1 in 5** people with learning difficulties who are over the age of 65 will develop dementia.



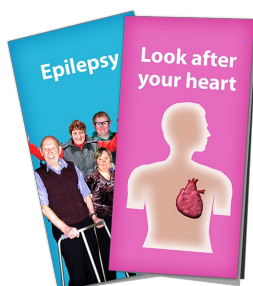
People with **Down's Syndrome** have a higher risk, with about **2 in 3** people over the age of 60 developing dementia. The most common type is Alzheimer's disease.



People with learning difficulties may find that their dementia **gets worse more quickly** than someone without a learning disability.



Sometimes there is a delay in getting a diagnosis of dementia. This might be because the dementia symptoms are put down to the person's learning difficulty.



People with a learning difficulty are more likely to have **other health issues** that will also need managing alongside their dementia.



This makes it even more important to get the right **care and support**.



Your North Yorkshire Charity
Care and Support for Life

Registered charity Number 1178225

It is a good idea to talk to your support worker or your GP. If dementia is diagnosed, **you can also talk to a dementia charity**, such as Dementia Forward.

What are the early symptoms of dementia?



Knowing how to spot the signs can help the person get the right support or **faster treatment**.



There are **early signs** you can look out for, including:



Changes to **living skills**, such as forgetting how to do things they have always done or getting lost in familiar places.



Doing **tasks** differently, such as putting things in unusual places or having less concentration.



Changes to **personality or mood**, such as behaving out of character or not being interested in regular activities.



Any changes that you notice, can play an important part in helping to spot the **early signs** of dementia.



If you notice that the changes are happening often, **tell the GP** or learning disability team as soon as you can.



They can **send the person for tests** that will help to find out if the person has dementia or not.

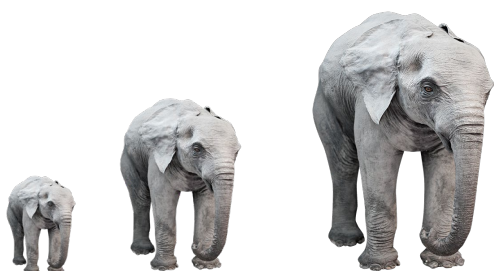


These **changes can all be caused by other things**, so they don't mean that the person has dementia.



However, all changes should be looked at by the **GP** or learning disability team.

How do symptoms of dementia progress?



The changes may be **small to start with**, but may become more noticeable.



How quickly this happens will be different for different people.



As dementia gets worse, the person may change the way they **act and express themselves differently**.



This might be asking the **same question** over and over, pacing back and forth, or becoming restless or upset.



They may also have **problems sleeping** and moving about.

What to do to support someone with a learning difficulty and dementia?



Use **simple language** and avoid jargon.



Be patient and understanding.



Repeat information and **answer questions** when asked.



Use **photos, objects and gestures** to help communicate.



Be respectful of the person's wishes.



Make the space **calm and comfortable**.



Encourage the person to **keep active**.

How to support a friend or family member with dementia?



The person may need help to do things they have always done or to remember where things are. **You can help by writing notes or showing them.**



They may feel lonely and confused and **need reassurance** and someone to talk to. Be kind and patient.



The person may start to behave differently. **Try to remain calm and understand that it is not their fault.**



It is important to keep spending time with them. You could **support them to do things they enjoy**, such as listening to music and going out in the garden.

Where to go for information.



Support, advice and information to anybody affected by dementia in York and North Yorkshire.

Phone - 03300 578592

Web - dementiaforward.org.uk



Support with any aspect of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

Phone - 0800 888 6678

Web - dementiauk.org



Information, support and advice for anyone affected by dementia.

Phone - 0333 150 3456

Web - alzheimers.org.uk



Online learning resource about learning disabilities and develop dementia.

Web - bild.org.uk/resource/learning-disabilities-and-dementia/



Information for people with dementia and their families and friends.

Web - nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/

About this Easy Read Summary.



An Easy Read Guide about dementia and how it can affect people with learning difficulties.

By learning difficulties we mean, **people who have** been told they have, or self define with the terms of learning difficulties', 'learning disability', 'autism', 'aspergers', 'neurodiverse' or other labels.



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