



**Alzheimer
Scotland**
Action on Dementia

Worried about your memory?





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Alzheimer Scotland is Scotland's national dementia charity. Our aim is to make sure nobody faces dementia alone. We provide support and information to people with dementia, their carers and families, we campaign for the rights of people with dementia and fund vital dementia research.

We have Dementia Resource Centres right across Scotland. These Centres provide a safe and friendly environment for people with dementia and their carers to visit and take part in a wide variety of activity groups.

We are also very proud of our 24 hour Freephone Dementia Helpline which provides information and emotional support to people with dementia, carers, families, friends and professionals.

Our National Dementia Advisor Service provides a responsive, high quality information, advice and advocacy service relating to all aspects of brain health and dementia.

We also have a network of support for people living with and caring for someone with dementia in communities across Scotland. For more information on what's going on in your local area, contact our Helpline on **0808 808 3000**.

What's inside

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Hello and welcome | 4 |
| What can affect memory? | 5 |
| When to see your doctor? | 6 |
| What if it is dementia? | 8 |
| Helping your memory | 9 |
| What can you do to keep well? | 10 |
| Brain Health Scotland | 11 |



Hello and welcome

If you are worried about lapses in your memory, or have noticed episodes that are new or unusual, this book provides information about the different physical and mental health problems that may be the cause.

There are several conditions that can lead to memory loss, and becoming forgetful doesn't always mean you have dementia. This book suggests when it might be appropriate to consult your doctor, and the steps you can take to continue to live well if you do receive a dementia diagnosis.

We have a range of further information on our website www.alzscot.org or you can contact our 24 hour Freephone Dementia Helpline on **0808 808 3000**.



What can affect memory?

Most people forget things from time to time, but if you keep having problems with your memory and these are affecting your day-to-day life, it's important to see your doctor. It could be caused by something that can be treated and any treatment you need may work better if it's started early.



Some of the things that can affect memory are:

- stress or anxiety (worrying about your memory can make it seem worse).
- having too many things on your mind.
- illness and infection.
- unhappiness and depression.
- bereavement.
- lack of sleep.
- noise or other distractions.
- vitamin deficiency or a thyroid disorder.
- the side effects of sleeping pills, sedatives or other drugs.
- overuse of alcohol.
- the menopause.
- conditions such as mild cognitive impairment, a stroke or dementia.
- a minor brain injury after a bump to the head, or concussion.
- delirium.
- general anaesthetic.

When to see your doctor?

There is no single specific test that can show whether someone has dementia. A diagnosis is made by talking to you and perhaps a relative or friend to find out more about your difficulties with memory and thinking. You will also need a physical and neurological examination which will look at all other possible causes.

Consider seeing your doctor if:

- your memory has changed significantly or rapidly from what is 'normal' for you
- your memory has been getting steadily worse over a period of time
- your memory is causing new problems in your life, such as difficulty managing money, or forgetting important appointments
- your memory is causing you confusion and you are needing help with daily tasks
- you are noticing other problems too, such as changes in your mood or behaviour, having difficulty following conversations or problems with language and understanding
- people close to you start telling you that they are worried about you forgetting things



Mild cognitive impairment

Mild cognitive impairment, MCI for short, can affect people of any age, but is more common in older people. MCI means that although you can still function perfectly well, you have more difficulty with mental abilities than would be expected at your age.

If you have MCI, you will probably feel that your memory isn't quite what it used to be. Some people find that other mental processes are also affected. For example, you may have difficulty with concentration. MCI can develop for multiple reasons, and some individuals living with MCI may go on to develop dementia; others will not. For neurodegenerative diseases, MCI can be an early stage of the disease continuum if the hallmark changes in the brain are also present. In some individuals, MCI reverts to normal cognition or remains stable. In other cases, such as when a medication causes cognitive impairment, MCI is mistakenly diagnosed. It is important that people experiencing cognitive changes seek help as soon as possible for diagnosis and possible treatment.



Brain injury

Memory problems are very common after brain injuries, such as traumatic brain injuries, strokes, tumours or viral infections. After a significant head injury – one in which the person loses consciousness for a period of more than a few minutes – it is possible to experience a period of post-concussion syndrome and memory problems, sometimes for quite a while. Some people have trouble remembering events or things that have happened in the past, while some people's short-term memory is affected.

If you feel that your memory is not as good as it was before a head injury, speak to your doctor about it. Explain what happened and the changes you have noticed. You may be referred to a neuropsychologist or an occupational therapist who will be able to help you with the changes in your memory.

Headway www.headway.org.uk is a charity supporting people who have had a brain injury and have resources available that may be helpful.



What if it is dementia?

Dementia is an illness that affects the brain. The four most common types of dementia are Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body dementia.

Only a doctor can diagnose you with dementia. Although progressive, it can be very gradual. If you have a diagnosis of dementia, it does not mean you will suddenly become very ill or dependent on others.

If you have been told that you have dementia, you may be feeling a range of emotions. Shock, disbelief and even relief can all be natural responses to dementia. Talk to someone about how you feel. Our Helpline is available on **0808 808 3000** for information, support and advice.

Everyone in Scotland diagnosed with dementia from 1 April 2013 is entitled to at least a year of support after diagnosis. You can ask your GP or find out more on our website at **www.alzscot.org/pds**

Most forms of dementia are not inherited, although genetics can play a part. This is more common in younger onset dementia. If you have a family history of dementia and would like further information you should discuss this with your doctor.



Helping your memory

There are many practical ways to help yourself if you are having difficulty with your memory.

Different things will help different people. Think about the main things that frustrate you, and then work out ways around them. Establish routines for yourself so that you don't have to rely on your memory all the time.

Here are a few examples:

- making lists.
- using a diary to recall dates and appointments.
- routinely putting important things in the same place
- maintaining a familiar routine.
- planning ahead when visiting unfamiliar places.

What can you do to keep well?



Tips for keeping well – some may not help your memory directly but might help you enjoy life more.

- keep up your normal activities as much as you can – ask for help if you need it
- stay involved with your family, friends and community, and enjoy an active social life
- be aware of situations that may be difficult or stressful for you – plan ahead and don't be afraid to ask for help if you feel uncertain or worried
- check your medication – ask your doctor if you need all the medication you are currently taking and return what you don't need to a pharmacist
- ask your doctor to check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- eat a balanced and healthy diet – ask your doctor or practice nurse for advice
- do some regular physical activity, such as walking – aim for at least half an hour most days
- don't smoke – even if you have smoked for years, you will benefit from stopping – your own health, your finances, your safety (lower fire hazard risk) and the health of others around you will all improve if you stop
- don't drink to excess or take illegal drugs – these can make you confused
- keep your mind active – continue with the things you enjoy, or take up a new interest
- reduce stress, or if you can't avoid it, ask your doctor or community psychiatric nurse (CPN) about stress management – simple relaxation exercises can help a lot
- make sure you get enough sleep

Brain Health Scotland

You might be interested to find out more about looking after your brain from our team at Brain Health Scotland www.brainhealth.scot

Our mission is to inspire and empower you to protect your brain health and reduce your risk of diseases that lead to dementia.

We work with all ages, across the whole of Scotland, to provide all you need to protect your brain and to join the effort to understand more about this amazing part of who you are.

Contact us

We hope you have found this guide useful but if you have any questions or need further advice, you can:

Visit our website at www.alzscot.org

Call our 24 hour Freephone Dementia Helpline on **0808 808 3000** or email helpline@alzscot.org

Or for general enquiries email us at info@alzscot.org

Find us on social [@alzscot](https://www.instagram.com/alzscot)

