Ok, let’s talk dementia
From spotting the signs to reducing your risk.
Over the next few pages, you’ll find the answers to many of the questions you might have about dementia, alongside details of where you can find further information.

You’ll read about the different types of dementia, how to spot some of the early signs, as well as steps you can take to reduce your risk of the condition.

With more in the news every day about dementia, we’re also here to help you separate the facts from the fiction.

But before all that, we’ll start by taking a look at an orange...
While scary, this does prove that dementia is caused by physical diseases that we can – and will – overcome through the power of research.

"While scientists fight dementia in the lab, by sharing the film anyone can fight the misunderstanding and fatalism that surrounds dementia in our society."

Christopher Eccleston

It’s a reasonable question to ask. But a simple orange is actually quite a good way to explain dementia. You see, dementia is a misunderstood condition – it’s feared by many and often thought of as an inevitable part of growing old, or dismissed as ‘forgetfulness’. But as Christopher Eccleston explained in our recent online film, this isn’t the case. Here’s why:

"What is dementia? And why an orange?"

Firstly, dementia isn’t a natural part of ageing. It’s actually caused by diseases, just like cancer or AIDS.

Alzheimer’s disease is the biggest cause of dementia. It physically attacks your brain. Gradually damaging and destroying brain cells.

This causes a variety of symptoms that, over time, can impact every aspect of a person’s life. Sadly, no one survives dementia – yet.

Because of this damage, the brain of a person with Alzheimer’s weighs around 140g less than a healthy brain. That’s about the weight of an orange.
“How can I tell the difference between dementia and normal ageing?”

As dementia is caused by different diseases, there are several symptoms to look out for. Many of them, like memory loss, are often associated with getting older so it can be hard to pick them out in the early stages. But in dementia, these symptoms tend to get worse over time until they start to get in the way of everyday life. Let’s take a look at a few examples.

**Typical age-related changes**

- Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.
- Sometimes forgetting the right word to use in a conversation.
- Forgetting where you parked your car or put your glasses every now and then.
- Making bad decisions from time to time.
- Becoming irritable now and then. For example, when your routine is disrupted.

**Possible signs of dementia**

- Forgetting important dates, repeatedly asking for the same information, or relying on notes or family members for everyday tasks.
- Having trouble following or joining a conversation, difficulty finding words, or stopping mid-conversation.
- Putting things in unusual places, losing items or getting lost; especially in unfamiliar places.
- Poor judgement or decision-making that is out of character and noticed by other people.
- Changes in mood and personality – becoming confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful, anxious or aggressive.
Dementia is the term we use to describe a set of symptoms caused by diseases like Alzheimer’s. As Alzheimer’s is by far the most common cause of dementia, it’s the one you’re most likely to be aware of. There are other forms of dementia though that affect different parts of the brain, and so can lead to different symptoms. Here are the most common ones, and some of the signs to look out for.

1. Alzheimer’s disease

Alzheimer’s is caused by a build up of proteins in the brain. This starts in the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory and spatial navigation. Over time, these proteins continue to build up in other areas of the brain and symptoms get worse. Early signs include:

- Regularly forgetting recent events, names and faces.
- Repeating yourself and asking the same questions.
- Getting confused about the date or time of day.
- Getting lost, especially in unfamiliar places.

2. Vascular dementia

Vascular dementia is caused by a reduction in blood flow to the brain, leading to the death of brain cells. This damage can affect different parts of the brain in different people and impact many everyday activities. Symptoms can include:

- Personality changes, depression and a loss of interest in daily activities.
- Difficulty walking and a feeling of disorientation.
- Becoming slower in your thinking.

It is possible to have more than one type of dementia, such as Alzheimer’s and vascular dementia. This is called ‘mixed dementia’.

Is dementia the same as Alzheimer’s?

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Dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB)

Also known as DLB, dementia with Lewy bodies is caused by small clumps of protein that build up inside nerve cells in the brain. In DLB, the nerve cells affected are in the areas of the brain that control thinking, memory and movement. Symptoms include:

• Changes in attention, alertness and confusion.
• Parkinson’s-type symptoms such as difficulty walking, stiffness or trembling.
• Visual hallucinations – especially seeing people or animals that aren’t really there.
• Movements during sleep and vivid dreams.

Frontotemporal dementia (FTD)

In frontotemporal dementia, the brain shrinks in the frontal and temporal lobes – responsible for personality, emotions, behaviour and language. There is also a build-up of specific proteins in these areas of the brain, leading to:

• Personality changes and a lack of understanding of other people’s feelings.
• Lack of personal awareness, such as personal hygiene and grooming.
• Lack of social awareness, such as making inappropriate jokes.
• Overeating or changes in diet.

Find out more at www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/the-brain-tour
“How do you know if you have dementia?”

Your doctor should be your first port of call if you’re concerned about dementia. They can help you rule out any other causes of symptoms. If they do suspect dementia, there are a few things that might happen next.

1. They are likely to ask you questions about your symptoms.
2. You may be referred to a memory clinic or specialist doctor.
3. You’re likely to be asked to do memory and thinking tests during your assessment.
4. The doctor may arrange other tests, including blood tests and brain scans to understand more about what’s happening in the brain to cause your symptoms.

An early diagnosis can help you get the best available treatment and support.

“What treatments are available?”

There are a small number of drug and non-drug treatments for specific forms of dementia. Current treatments help the symptoms, but don’t cure the disease. This means that, while they don’t stop the disease from progressing, they can help people enjoy a better quality of life for longer.

Drugs like donepezil, used to treat Alzheimer’s and some symptoms of dementia with Lewy bodies, can help improve memory, communication and day-to-day activities for a time.

As the UK’s leading dementia research charity, Alzheimer’s Research UK is working to bring about more effective, life-changing treatments for people living with dementia.

You can find out more about dementia treatments and our research at alzheimersresearchuk.org or by calling our Infoline on 0300 111 5111.

“…”

“I will never comprehend how brave my dad is for always staying positive after his diagnosis. I know he does it for us, and I had to document his journey to show the world that you can have happiness despite it.”

Mariel Kirton
Alzheimer’s Research UK supporter

You can follow Mariel’s dad’s journey with Alzheimer’s at instagram.com/endalzheimers_ray

An early diagnosis can help you get the best available treatment and support.
Here are some ways you can help to reduce your risk of dementia:

**Avoid smoking**

We all know how harmful smoking can be, especially for increasing our chances of developing cancer. But there is also evidence that smoking can increase your risk of dementia, particularly Alzheimer’s disease.

For help quitting, the NHS Smokefree National Helpline is free to call on 0300 123 1044.

**Stay active**

Regular physical activity not only helps you maintain a healthy body, it can have knock-on benefits for your brain too. It can reduce stress, improve wellbeing and reduce your risk of dementia. You don’t have to run marathons. For example, getting off the bus a stop earlier could help you do more walking, or leaving the car keys at home and cycling to the shops could help you stay active.

“Can I reduce my risk of developing dementia?”

Despite what the papers might say, there’s no one thing you can do to prevent dementia altogether. But for most forms of dementia, there are small steps you can take to reduce your risk. While this unfortunately doesn’t mean removing all chances of getting it, it will help stack the odds in your favour.

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How active do I need to be each week?

For moderate activities, such as gardening, cleaning or walking your dog, you should aim to do about 150 minutes a week, e.g. 30 minutes, five days a week.

For more vigorous activities, like cycling, jogging or tennis, try for around 75 minutes a week, e.g. 15 minutes, five days a week.
Eat well

It sounds simple, but looking after your body, specifically your heart, is a good way to look after everything else. Enjoying a balanced diet and avoiding foods high in saturated fats can help lower cholesterol. It also reduces your risk of developing high blood pressure and diabetes; two conditions linked to a higher risk of dementia.

Stay sharp

Several studies have suggested a link between mentally stimulating leisure activities and a lower risk of dementia. This could be as simple as reading, completing crosswords or joining a club. Either way, the more you use your brain, the more resistant it could become to damage – just like training a muscle. For more interesting ways to keep your brain active, turn to page 19.

Drink sensibly

The guidelines for drinking alcohol advise not regularly drinking more than 14 units a week. People who do drink this much should spread drinking over three or more days, and try to have a few alcohol-free days each week too. While there is little evidence that alcohol causes Alzheimer’s disease, it is linked with other types of dementia. Long-term heavy drinking is known to cause alcohol-related dementia, including Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome.

This unit converter is based on the imperial (UK) measurement system. The volume and alcohol content in the table below is related to the measurement shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 unit</th>
<th>1.5 units</th>
<th>1 unit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.5 pints</td>
<td>1 pint</td>
<td>0.75 pints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250ml</td>
<td>500ml</td>
<td>375ml</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small (125ml) glass of wine</td>
<td>A small (125ml) glass of wine</td>
<td>A public measure (25ml) of spirits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 unit</th>
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<tr>
<td>Half a pint</td>
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<tr>
<td>(almost 300ml) of normal strength beer, cider or lager (for example, 3.5% ABV)</td>
<td>(almost 300ml) of normal strength beer, cider or lager (for example, 3.5% ABV)</td>
<td>(almost 300ml) of normal strength beer, cider or lager (for example, 3.5% ABV)</td>
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You’ll find plenty more information on risk reduction on our website. Simply head to alzheimersresearchuk.org/reducingtherisk

What are the benefits of following this advice?

Following this advice could have two benefits. The first is to reduce your chances of developing dementia. The second is to maintain your cognitive reserve so that, if you do develop a disease like Alzheimer’s, the symptoms may take longer to appear.

What is cognitive reserve?

Cognitive reserve is like a supply of water you keep in a tank. You need this water to function in everyday life. You can add to the supply by staying mentally and physically active, socialising often and leading a healthy lifestyle. You can also take away from it by smoking, drinking too much and leading an unhealthy lifestyle.

If you develop a disease like Alzheimer’s, small leaks start to appear in the tank. If you have built up a big reserve of water it will take a lot longer for this to run out – and it will take longer for symptoms to show. If you haven’t, the same amount of damage to the tank will cause you to run out of water much sooner – meaning the disease will progress more quickly. So it’s important to try to lead a healthy, engaged lifestyle.
While there’s no simple solution for preventing dementia, challenging your brain with mental activities like these can be an enjoyable addition to an active, engaged life. Give them a go but be warned, they’re not as easy as they seem.

How can I exercise my brain?

1. Say the days of the week in reverse order, then in alphabetical order. (Speak other languages? Try doing the same in Spanish, French, Mandarin…)
2. Say the months of the year in alphabetical order. Easy? Try doing so backwards, in reverse alphabetical order.
3. Find the sum of your date of birth, mm/dd/yyyy. Want a tougher brain teaser? Do the same with your spouse’s or best friend’s date of birth.
4. Name two objects for every letter in your first name. Work up to five objects, trying to use different items each time.
5. Look around wherever you are and, within two minutes, try to find five red things that will fit in your pockets, and five blue objects that are too big to fit.

For the majority of people, the short answer is no. As dementia is so common, many of us will have loved ones living with the condition. But this doesn’t mean we’re destined to develop it too. For some families, early-onset Alzheimer’s and frontotemporal dementia can be caused by faulty genes that do run in families. Usually, the symptoms of these diseases start in your 30s, 40s or 50s.

These genetic forms of dementia are incredibly rare, accounting for less than 1% of dementia cases. If you are concerned or have a question then please, don’t hesitate to call our Infoline on 0300 111 5111.

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Let’s keep talking

The information in this guide is just the start. If a few more questions have come up as you were reading through, or if you’re worried about a loved one, we can help. You can:

Call our Dementia Research Infoline on **0300 111 5111**

Visit our website at **alzheimersresearchuk.org**

Read our blog at **dementiablog.org**

Read more about dementia at **alzheimersresearchuk.org/helpful-information**

Who are we?

We’re the UK’s largest dementia research charity. It’s our mission to bring about the first life-changing treatment for dementia by 2025 and, ultimately, improve the lives of every person living with the condition.

Backed by our generous supporters, we focus our energies in four key areas of research to make this a reality:

1. Understand the diseases that cause dementia.
2. Diagnose people earlier and more accurately.
3. Reduce risk, backed by the latest evidence.
4. Treat dementia effectively.

We hope that the information in this guide will help you talk about dementia with friends and family. Thank you for reading.