Worried about your memory?

‘I remember that day as clear as can be… but it’s a struggle to recall what I did this morning.’
This booklet is for people who are worried about their memory, or the memory of someone close to them. It will help you to understand why people may develop memory problems and the importance of speaking to your GP about any concerns.

Should I be concerned about my memory?

It happens to all of us from time to time. You can’t put a name to a face. You forget where you put your keys. You can’t remember where you parked the car. Most of the time such slips are a nuisance, rather than a sign of something more serious.

But if you are worried that your memory is getting noticeably worse, or if memory loss is beginning to affect your everyday life, it is worth seeking advice. You might also be concerned about someone close to you. It’s important to seek advice because, in some cases, memory problems are an early sign of a medical condition such as dementia.
What can cause memory problems?

Memory problems are common. Many of us notice that our memory becomes less reliable as we get older. Stress, depression and certain physical illnesses are just a few of the things that can make memory worse. And, of course, some of us are more forgetful than others. But sometimes memory loss can be an early sign of dementia.

What is dementia?

Dementia is not a single illness but a group of symptoms caused by damage to the brain. It is more common in people over 65, but dementia can also affect younger people.

The symptoms of dementia can include loss of memory, confusion and difficulties with thinking things through, problem-solving and language. Sometimes people are affected by changes in mood or behaviour which is out of character.

Dementia is caused by a number of different diseases of the brain, the most common being Alzheimer’s disease.

Vascular dementia is the second most common type. Conditions such as high blood pressure, heart problems, high cholesterol and diabetes can all increase the chances of developing vascular dementia. It is important these conditions are identified at the earliest opportunity as there may be treatment and support available.
What signs should I look out for?

You should seek medical advice without delay if your memory loss is affecting daily life and especially if you:

- struggle to remember recent events, although you can easily recall things that happened in the past
- find it hard to follow conversations or programmes on TV
- forget the names of friends or everyday objects
- cannot recall things you have heard, seen or read
- lose the thread of what you are saying
- have problems thinking and reasoning
- feel anxious, depressed or angry
- feel confused even when in a familiar environment or get lost on familiar journeys
- find that other people start to notice or comment on your memory loss.

What should I do if I am worried?

If you are worried about your memory talk to your GP. They will listen to your concerns and possibly arrange for further investigation. You may be referred to a local memory clinic or hospital specialist for assessment where a formal diagnosis can be made.

If you are concerned about the memory of someone close to you, encourage them to visit their GP. You might start the conversation by gently asking the person if they’ve been feeling any different from usual or are struggling with anything.

It’s important to know that there are many reasons for memory loss apart from dementia. These can include depression, infections and vitamin and thyroid deficiencies. The earlier you seek help the better, as there may be support or treatment available that can help you.

For more information, phone our National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122 or see alzheimers.org.uk/memoryworry
What if it is dementia?

Whether a diagnosis of dementia comes as a shock or confirms your suspicions, you may experience a range of emotions – you might feel frightened, angry, worried, sad or frustrated. However, you may also be relieved to find there is a medical reason for the memory problems.

In some cases a specialist may be able to prescribe drugs that can lessen symptoms for a while. You should also be offered the chance to attend groups or take part in activities that may help you and any carer to cope better.

Your local social services department can do an assessment and may be able to work with you to arrange or provide services to support you at home.

Although there is currently no cure for dementia, with treatment, advice and support, many people who have the condition lead active, fulfilling lives.
Brenda’s story

I’d had memory problems for about two or three years and I was asking the same questions I’d asked several times before. I wasn’t noticing myself at first.

The family encouraged me to make an appointment with the GP. I met a memory specialist as well, and was diagnosed and put on medication.

Of course there are things my husband, Alan, has to remind me of but it’s not changed our everyday life at all. I can still do the things I used to. I enjoy going walking a lot. We go out for lunch and meals with friends quite often. I am starting to go to the cricket.

You don’t realise how many people are affected with it. I feel OK telling people I have problems. People used to be ashamed of things like this but now it’s different.

The GP has been very supportive and helpful. It’s so easy to get information and everybody is trying to help me out. I’m just happy that everyone is doing what they can for me.
How Alzheimer’s Society can help

If you are concerned about memory problems, or would like to know more about the symptoms of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk/memoryworry

Alzheimer’s Society is the UK’s leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications, National Dementia Helpline, website and more than 2,000 local services.

For more information visit alzheimers.org.uk, or to connect with others who are affected by memory problems, visit our online discussion forum, Talking Point, at alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint

‘I feel OK telling people I have problems. People used to be ashamed of things like this but now it’s different.’

Brenda, Derbyshire, living with dementia
If you are worried, contact your GP. The earlier you seek help, the sooner you can get information, advice and support.

If you have any concerns about your memory, or the memory of someone close to you, you can also visit alzheimers.org.uk or call Alzheimer’s Society’s National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122. Opening hours: Monday–Friday 9am–5pm, Saturday–Sunday 10am–4pm.

Alzheimer’s Society
Devon House
58 St Katharine’s Way
London E1W 1LB

T 020 7423 3500
E info@alzheimers.org.uk

alzheimers.org.uk