

What is dementia? An introduction



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Go to <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/improving-care-and-support/people-with-dementia/what-is-dementia-an-introduction> for the latest version.

Find out about different types of dementia, including Alzheimer's, Vascular Dementia, Dementia with Lewy Bodies, Mixed Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia

What is dementia? An introduction

We can think of dementia as an umbrella term for a number of conditions that affect people. Dementia is the umbrella and the different types of dementia, such as Alzheimer's Disease will be underneath the umbrella.

There are over 100 different types of dementia.

Depending on the type of dementia, you can expect to see changes in a person's ability to remember, think, reason and solve problems.

There may be changes to a person's communication skills and their ability to carry out everyday activities.

These symptoms may become progressively worse over several years and will affect different people in different ways.

As people with dementia won't get better, we need to ensure we are providing the best care and support to help minimise its impact on their everyday life.

While things will inevitably change if a person has dementia, people can and do live well with the condition. Simple adjustments can help compensate for some of the symptoms and changes.

These may include changes in and around the home, 'grading' or simplifying favourite hobbies and pastimes, and maintaining relationships with friends and

family.

We'll cover many of these ideas in this resource. In addition, changes in the wider community to make it more dementia-friendly will support people to continue to do the things they value.

The Welsh Government's Dementia Action Plan for Wales commits to raising awareness and understanding of dementia across the country.

[The Dementia Action Plan for Wales 2018-2022](#)

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's Disease is the most common type of dementia, affecting six out of ten people with dementia in the UK.

Proteins build up in the brain to form 'plaques' and 'tangles' which results in structural changes to the brain. The brain becomes physically smaller and lighter as a result.

Acetylcholine, a chemical messenger which allows messages to be transmitted around the brain, is also affected so messages are not transmitted as effectively.

Symptoms develop slowly over a number of years, gradually becoming worse and having a greater impact on a person's ability to carry out everyday tasks.

Vascular dementia

Vascular dementia is the second most common type of dementia, and is caused by reduced blood supply to the brain.

This may be due to a stroke, or a series of mini strokes or changes to the small vessels within the brain.

Vascular dementia progresses in steps, with people experiencing a drop in function following a vascular incident.

[What is vascular dementia?](#)

Mixed dementia

Mixed dementia occurs when Alzheimer's Disease comes with another type of dementia, commonly vascular dementia.

Dementia with Lewy Bodies (DLB)

Dementia with Lewy Bodies (DLB) is the third most common type of dementia affecting 15 in 100 people with dementia. It is caused by another protein building up in the brain resulting in Lewy bodies.

Lewy bodies are found in areas of the brain responsible for thinking, memory and movement. This results in the memory and thinking issues associated with Alzheimer's Disease and the movement problems associated with Parkinson's Disease.

Fluctuations are common and unpredictable and visual hallucinations are a key feature.

[Information and support for Dementia with Lewy Bodies \(DLB\) from Parkinson's UK](#)

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD) is a relatively rare type of dementia, accounting for less than 5 per cent of dementia cases, usually affecting younger people.

It is caused by damage to brain cells in the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain, resulting in changes to personality, emotions and behaviour. Language difficulties are common.

[Information about frontotemporal dementia](#)

Useful resources

[The British Deaf Association has British Sign Language \(BSL\) videos explaining the different types of dementia](#)

[The Many Faces of Dementia](#) - a free interactive course to talk you through the stories, symptoms and science behind less common types of dementia

[Dementia UK](#), which includes a list of local support organisations in Wales

[Read more about Winston's World](#)

Research links

Improve your practice by accessing the latest research findings.

[CADR](#) (the Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research) is a world class research centre addressing internationally important questions in ageing and dementia. The Centre is a collaboration between Swansea, Bangor and Cardiff Universities.

[What causes visual hallucinations in dementia with Lewy bodies?](#)

[The ACE approach: promoting well-being and peer support for younger people with dementia](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Dementia resource for care professionals by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).