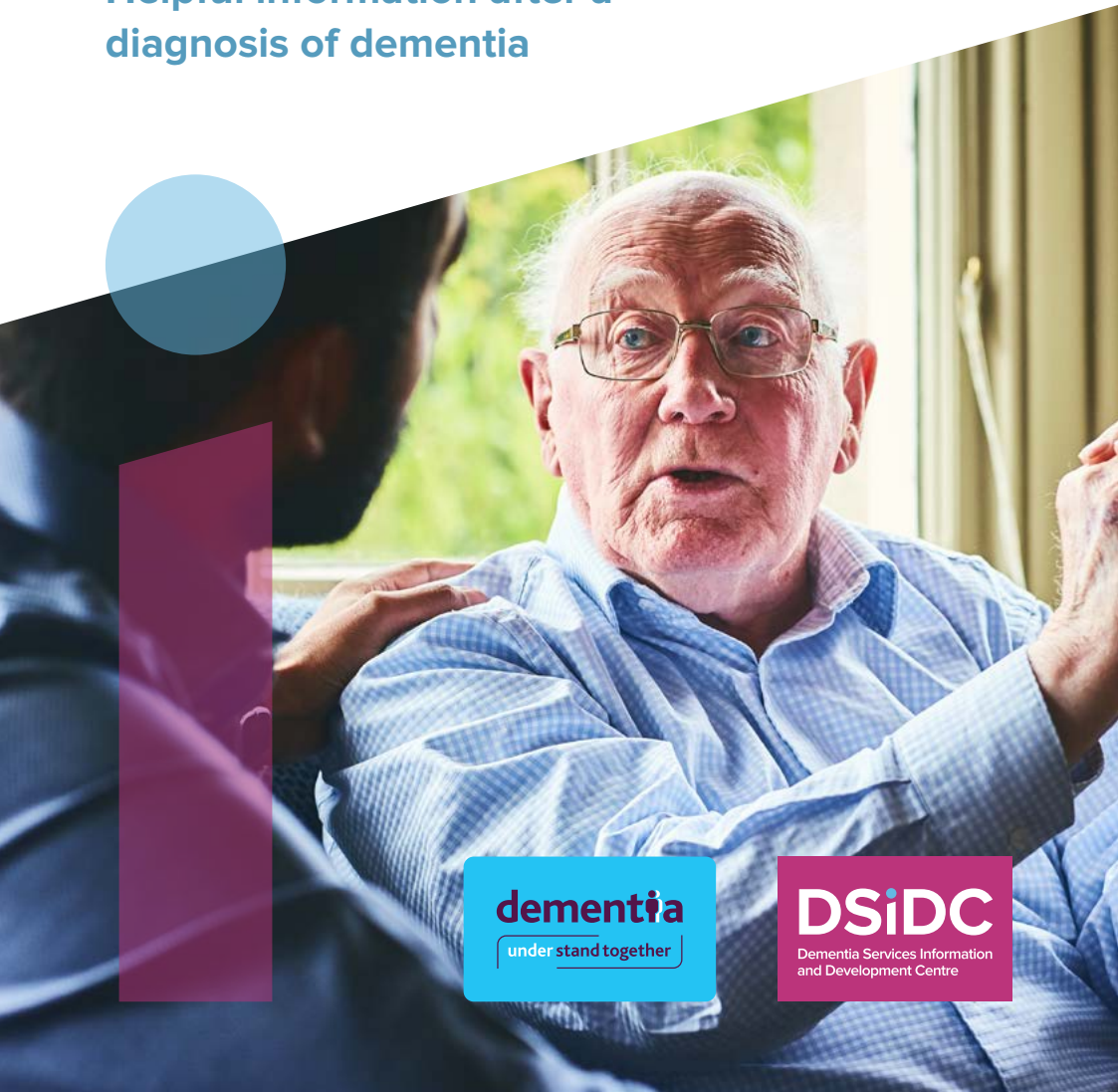


Pills, bills and wills

Helpful information after a
diagnosis of dementia



dementia
understand together

DSiDC
Dementia Services Information
and Development Centre

If you or somebody you support has been given a diagnosis of dementia you may find this leaflet useful.

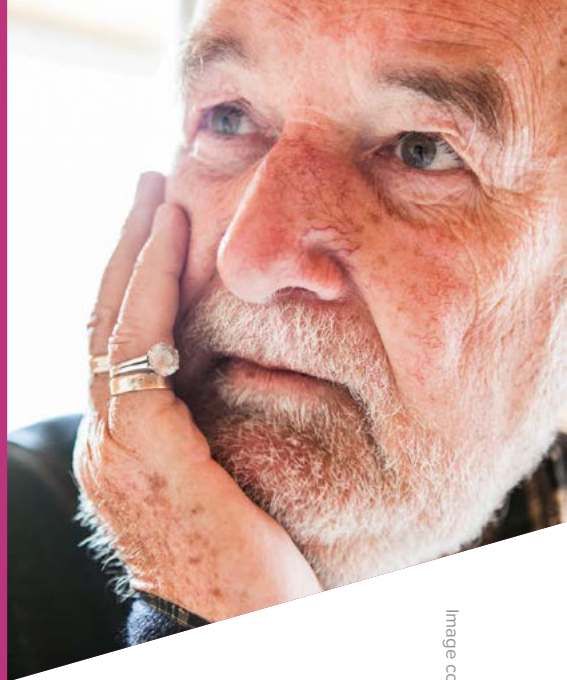


Image courtesy of Michael Hagedorn

What is dementia?

Dementia is when difficulties with memory, thinking, problem-solving, language, mood or behaviour begin to affect a person's ability to manage their daily life.

Dementia is usually caused by a disease that affects the brain.

Diseases that can cause dementia include Alzheimer's disease, vascular disease, frontotemporal degeneration, Lewy body disease and Parkinson's disease. Examples of the injuries that may cause dementia are head injuries or stroke.

The symptoms of dementia that a person experiences will depend on the parts of the brain that are damaged and the disease that is causing the dementia.

It is very difficult to predict the course of dementia. Every person is different and how dementia affects each person will be different too. A person's general health, their attitude to life, their mood, and the support they have can also make a difference.

There is no cure for dementia at present and it cannot be stopped or reversed. But in many cases, dementia is a slowly developing condition that gives people the opportunity to make changes to their lives and develop ways to manage symptoms.

This booklet covers some of the practical issues that may arise after a diagnosis of dementia.



Medicine

Medicines for Alzheimer's disease

Medicine does not stop or reverse the damage caused by the disease but it can improve the symptoms or help with concentration. The same medicine can also be used for Lewy body dementia and Parkinson's disease dementia.

The three main medicines that are prescribed are:

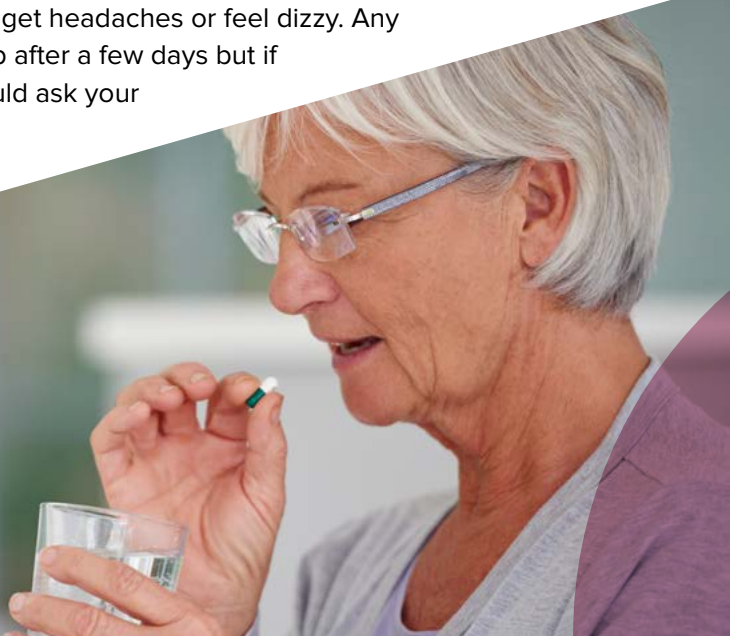
- › Donepezil (sometimes sold as Donecept® or Aricept®)
- › Rivastigmine (sometimes sold as Exelon®)
- › Galantamine (sometimes sold as Reminyl®)

Another medicine called Memantine can also be prescribed.

New medicines are currently being developed and tested, and may become available in the future. Your doctor will be able to tell you about the best treatments that are available now.

Side effects

Most people have no problems with side effects. But the most common ones are sickness, loose bowels or vivid dreams. Sometimes people can get headaches or feel dizzy. Any side effects usually stop after a few days but if they continue, you should ask your doctor for advice.



Medicines for vascular dementia

A doctor can prescribe medicines that can treat the causes of vascular dementia and possibly stop it progressing. These include medicines for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and drugs like aspirin to reduce the risk of a stroke or blood clots.

Medicines for other dementias

There are other types of dementia that do not respond to medication. However, the doctor may be able to treat symptoms of the dementia such as mood or agitation.



Brain health and lifestyle

Having a healthy lifestyle, including limiting alcohol intake and stopping smoking, can help improve your quality of life after a diagnosis of dementia.

For some people, lifestyle changes can slow the progress of dementia. These lifestyle changes include:

Take exercise

Regular exercise can help to keep the body and mind healthy. It can also improve sleep and mood.

The minimum recommended amount of exercise is 30 minutes a day, five days a week. The exercise should raise your heart rate and make you breathe faster. There is no need to play a sport, join a gym or buy any special clothes or equipment to exercise. A brisk walk or jog, cutting the grass and even cleaning the house count as exercise. The exercise can be broken up into 10-minute sessions if necessary.

Image courtesy of Michael Hagedorn



Eat a healthy diet

Most experts recommend a Mediterranean-style diet. This means a diet with lots of brightly coloured fruit and vegetables and less saturated fats (such as butter). They also recommend eating oily fish at least twice a week and eating white meat (such as chicken) instead of red meat like steak.



Keep your brain active

Staying mentally active is very important for overall health. 'Brain exercise' should involve doing something you enjoy that also needs brain power – such as crosswords, jigsaws or Sudoku.

Taking on new experiences can also stimulate your brain. For example, you could go to the theatre or a rugby match, or try brushing your teeth with your left hand (if you are right-handed) or vice versa. Look at the website www.hellobrain.eu for more tips on a healthy brain.





Meet other people

Life is often more enjoyable when we share it with others. Getting out and about and meeting people is better than sitting at home watching TV. It is important to keep in regular contact with family, friends and neighbours. Consider joining a local club, class or organisation such as a choir, an art class, the local men's shed or a ladies club.

Churches, community centres and libraries are a good source of information about what's going on in your area.

Keeping socially engaged helps to keep you mentally sharp as well as being fun.

Look after your eyesight and your hearing

Poor vision and poor hearing can make it difficult to do everyday tasks and can also make it harder to stay connected to family and friends. It is important to wear glasses and hearing aids if they are needed. Remember to have your eyesight and hearing checked regularly.

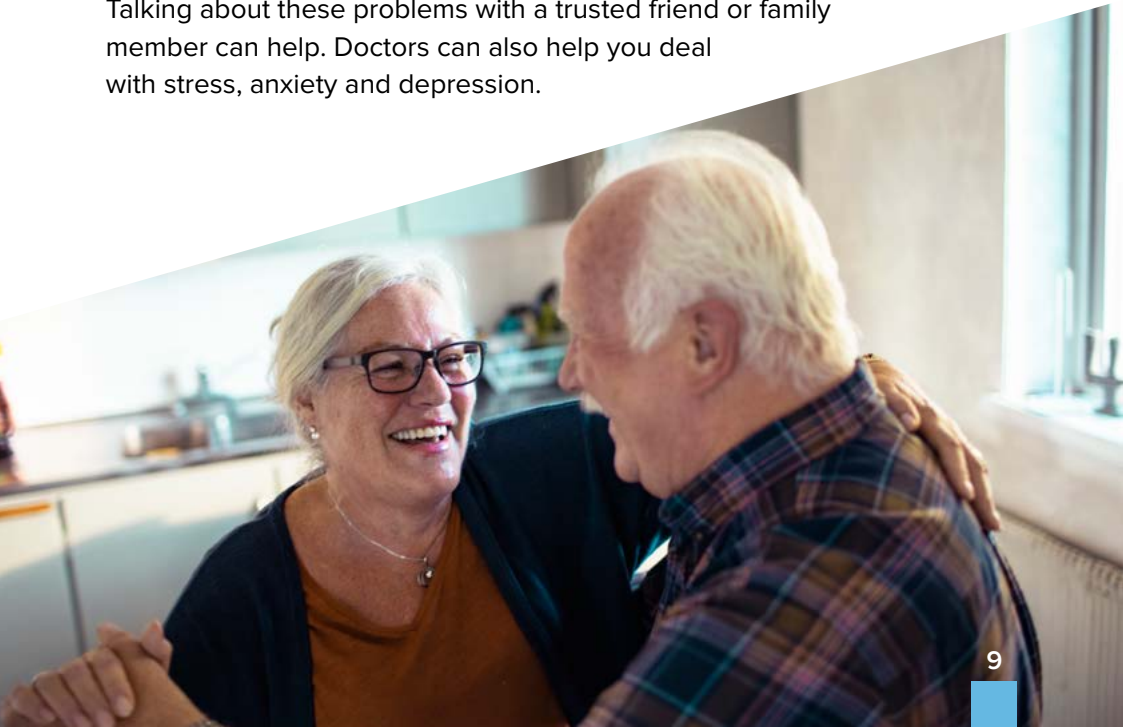
Have a positive outlook on life

Having a positive attitude will help after a diagnosis of dementia. You should try to focus on the positives and not the negatives. Try not to worry about past events or about things that may or may not happen. A good way to avoid this is to bring your mind back to the present. Enjoy today, yesterday is gone, tomorrow will be another day.

Mindfulness is a skill that helps people bring their mind back to the present. People use mindfulness because they find it reduces stress and gives them a greater sense of control over their lives. Mindfulness can help you to get more enjoyment out of the good times and to handle the bad times better. Find out more on the website: www.beaumont.ie/marc

Stress, anxiety and depression can make memory problems worse. Stress is a reaction to changes in life. These changes could be about money or family or your feelings. Stress can affect both body and mind.

Talking about these problems with a trusted friend or family member can help. Doctors can also help you deal with stress, anxiety and depression.



Emotional impact of a diagnosis

We are all different and no two people will respond to a diagnosis of dementia in the same way. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to react to the news of a diagnosis.

You should give yourself time to process the news and come to terms with your new situation. Try to accept help and support when it is offered. Many people find that talking to other people with dementia, and their families, is helpful because they can share experiences and useful advice.







Driving

Most people can continue to drive after a diagnosis of dementia but there are some legal requirements. You must:

- › Inform your insurance company about the diagnosis. This is to ensure that you are appropriately covered.
- › Inform the National Driving Licence Service (NDLS) about the diagnosis. You will have to visit your local NDLS centre with:
 - 1 Your current driving licence
 - 2 Proof of your PPS number
 - 3 A completed Driving Licence Application form (D401*)
 - 4 A Driving Licence Medical Report (D501*) completed by a GP

* These forms are available on the National Driving Licence Service website.

In addition, your doctor may ask you to take an on-road driving assessment.

The on-road driving assessment needs to be carried out by a qualified driving assessor. The driving assessor will charge a fee. Your doctor may have details of a local assessor and you can find more information by going to www.understandtogether.ie and putting 'driving' into the search box.



Financial planning

Here are some things to consider if you, or someone you know, is diagnosed with dementia.

Maximise your income

If you are still working, make sure you get professional advice before making any decision about your job. Dementia is a disability and there are laws to protect you. For more information, visit a Free Legal Advice Centre, based in your local Citizens Information Centre.

Claim any Social Welfare benefits that you may be entitled to, such as Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension.

A person living with, or caring for, someone diagnosed with dementia may be entitled to Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Support Grant or the Household Benefits Package. For more details, contact your local Citizens Information Centre.

Check insurance policies

Some life insurance policies and mortgage protection policies pay out early on a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Other insurance policies such as Specified Illness cover, Critical Illness cover or Income Protection may also pay out after a diagnosis or if you cannot continue working. Some of these payments may be substantial, so check your policies carefully. For more advice, visit a Free Legal Advice Centre in your local Citizens Information Centre.

Organise your money and bills

It is a good idea to simplify your financial affairs. This might mean closing some bank accounts and savings accounts, so you have all your money in only one or two accounts.

Consider arranging direct debits or standing orders to pay utility bills, so you don't miss any payments. Companies that provide electricity, gas and other services are reluctant to speak to people who do not have their name on the bill. Put utility bills into a joint name with a family member or close friend, so they can contact the company for you if there is a problem.

The leaflet 'Guide to Safeguarding your Money Now and in the Future' offers good practical advice about financial matters. It is available on the Banking and Payments Federation of Ireland website.



Apply for a medical card

A medical card entitles you to free visits to a doctor. If they prescribe any medicine, then you will only pay the prescription charge.

A medical card also covers public out-patient and in-patient hospital services, eye and ear tests, dental checks, and equipment that people may need in order to manage at home.

Medical cards are means tested and the limits of income are different for people under the age of 70 and over the age of 70.

It is always worth applying for the medical card because people who do not qualify are automatically assessed for the GP Visit Card. This entitles you to free visits to your GP if you are over the age of 70. If you are under 70, the GP Visit Card is means tested.

Certain types of dementia may qualify for the **Long-Term Illness Scheme**. This scheme covers the costs of medicine and medical equipment for the treatment of certain medical conditions. It is not means tested but the type of illness must be on the prescribed list. Some conditions that are related to Parkinson's disease (such as Lewy body dementia) may qualify. Application forms are available at your local Health Office and online. Visit your local Citizens Information Centre for more information.



Future planning

It is important to plan now for a time when you may not be able to make decisions. This section explains some of the ways that you can prepare for the future.

Make a will

In very simple terms, a will is a document where you decide what happens to your affairs after you die. You can choose one person (or more) to manage your affairs after your death. They are called executors.

It is very important that you make a will so you can decide what happens to your estate (such as money and property) when you die. After making a will, you should let your family (or executors) know where it is.

Enduring Power of Attorney

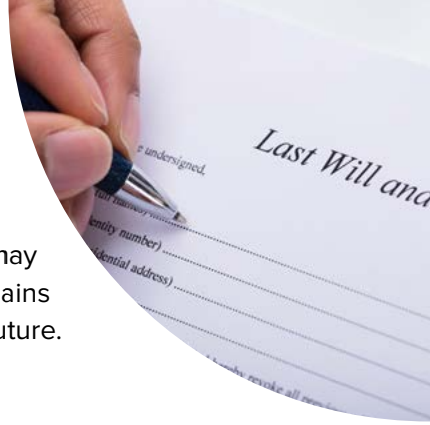
If you are able to make your own decisions but would like to plan for the future you could make an Enduring Power of Attorney.

An Enduring Power of Attorney is a document that permits a trusted family member or friend to look after a person's affairs if they are not able to make decisions for themselves. More than one person can be chosen to look after someone's affairs.

An Enduring Power of Attorney only comes into force if your doctor and your solicitor agree that you can no longer make decisions for yourself.

There is no set cost for this work so shop around for a reasonable price from a solicitor.

Visit the Decision Support Service website for more information www.decisionsupportservice.ie



Support with making decisions

In the future, it is possible that some of us will need support to make decisions. This is called a decision support arrangement. For example, we might need help making a decision about health, medical treatment or where we live. The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act provides for three levels of decision support assistance.

1. Decision-making assistance agreement

If you need a little support to make some decisions, you can choose someone to be your decision-making assistant. They can help you to get the information you need to make a decision and help you to understand it.

2. Co-decision-making agreement

If you need a little more support in making a decision, you can appoint a person you trust as your co-decision-maker. Decisions will be made jointly between you and the person you trust.

3. Decision-making representation order

If you are not able to make decisions even with support, the Circuit Court may appoint a decision-making representative for you. If possible, the court will appoint someone you know and trust as your decision-making representative. But if there is no-one willing or able to act on your behalf, the court may appoint someone from a panel of trained experts.

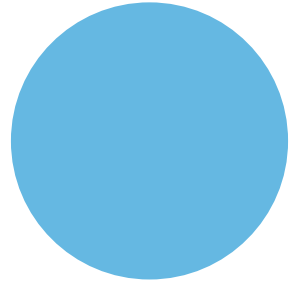
Advanced healthcare directives

An advanced healthcare directive is where you write down your wishes about healthcare and medical treatments in case you are not able to make these decisions in the future. You can appoint someone you know and trust to be your designated healthcare representative to ensure your wishes are followed.

Visit the Decision Support Service website for more information
www.decisionsupportservice.ie

Useful contact information

- › **Alzheimer Society of Ireland**
alzheimer.ie
Helpline: 1800 341 341
- › **Citizens Information**
www.citizensinformation.ie
Tel: 0818 074 000
- › **Free Legal Advice Centres**
www.flac.ie
Tel: 01 906 1010
- › **Community Law and Mediation**
communitylawandmediation.ie
Tel: 01 847 7804
- › **National Driving Licence Service**
www.ndls.ie
Tel: 0818 919 090 / 021 462 4810
- › **Decision Support Service**
www.decisionsupportservice.ie
Tel: 01 211 9750
- › **Understand Together**
www.understandtogether.ie
- › **Dementia Services Information and Development Centre**
www.dementia.ie
- › **Banking and Payments Federation of Ireland**
bpfi.ie



DSiDC

Dementia Services Information
and Development Centre

dementia

under stand together

Dementia Services Information and Development Centre
6th Floor, Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing
St James's Hospital, James's Street
Dublin 8, D08 E9P6
Tel: 01 416 2035

www.dementia.ie



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Approved by Plain English Ireland

