

# Dementia Fact Sheet

## What is dementia?

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of illnesses which cause a progressive decline in a person's functioning. It is a broad term that describes a loss of memory, social skills, intellect and usual emotional reactions. The person may look healthy physically but on the inside their brain is not working properly. There are a number of different forms of dementia, the most common being Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for 50-70% of all cases. Alzheimer's is a progressive, degenerative condition that affects the brain.

### How does dementia affect people?

Initially there may be only slight changes in personality or behaviour. They may become less motivated to do the things that previously they enjoyed or may feel insecure when separated from familiar surroundings or routines. The person with dementia may have word finding difficulty or may be repetitive in speech.

With progression of dementia, changes become more noticeable by others, affecting their concentration, understanding and their ability to reason. People with dementia may experience confusion, disorientation, mood swings and easily become frustrated as they struggle with the demands of everyday life.

### Memory Loss

Not everyone experiences memory loss but it is one of the main symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. The difference in dementia is that the memory loss is persistent and progressively worsens. It may affect a person's ability to continue to work, carry out familiar tasks, find their way home and may eventually mean being unable to recognise friends and family. A person with dementia may lose the car keys and then forget what they are used for.

### Who gets dementia?

Dementia can happen to anyone but increases in incidence with age. For people 70-75 years of age, approximately 1 person in 30 has dementia. For people aged 90-95, it is 1 person in 3. It can affect people in their 30's, 40's and 50's. About a third of people with Alzheimer's have a close relative who has or had dementia, but in most cases there is no family history.