

A guide to dementia

Recognising dementia

Dementia is a broad term describing the physical, mental and emotional changes brought about by physical changes in the brain. The symptoms vary according to the type of dementia and part of the brain involved.

It's a progressive condition, so symptoms that start out as minor can become more extreme over time, affecting that person's ability to live independently and safely. However, the right living environment, combined with the right approach to care, can slow that progression, reduce the negative feelings dementia brings, and enhance living standards and enjoyment of life.



Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. The disease causes proteins to build up in the brain, breaking connections between nerve cells, while fewer of the chemicals which transmit information are produced.

Frontotemporal dementia (and Pick's disease) is when the front and side parts of the brain are damaged by abnormal proteins. It's fairly rare and usually first affects people between the ages of 45 and 65.

Lewy bodies dementia involves proteins forming inside brain cells, altering the brain's chemistry and causing brain cells to die. It's related to Parkinson's disease and can share some physical symptoms.

Vascular dementia, the second most common form, is caused by reduced oxygen supply to the brain, typically identified suddenly after a major stroke, or gradually after a number of small strokes.

What to look for?

The signs you're most likely to see include memory loss, confusion, more limited communication and problem-solving skills, and more volatile or fragile emotions.

While there are definite differences in the early indicators of some forms of dementia – Lewy bodies may cause hallucinations but seldom memory loss in the early stages, whereas the first signs of Alzheimer's are often memory-related, and frontotemporal dementia will usually involve personality change first – there are overlapping symptoms, especially in later stages.

Our dementia specialists are trained and qualified to carry out assessments and monitor progress for new and current residents, to ensure they benefit from exactly the right levels of care.

“The staff and managers have been so kind, caring and attentive to my father and to myself - we have nothing but praise for them all.”

Daughter of resident at Burford House



Caring for people with dementia

Since memory loss, confusion and emotional vulnerability are common symptoms, familiarity is the key to designing a supportive dementia environment.

Westgate dementia areas have the comforting feel of home. They have been carefully designed to support residents with features such as a specially designed pathway, punctuated by visual memory prompts and colour association. No dead ends, no unwanted surprises. You'll also find secure sensory gardens, full of textures, colour and smell, to awaken the senses.

An individual care plan, developed around your loved one's personal preferences, history and lifestyle, guides a qualified team of specialists. We aim to stimulate, engage and entertain each resident as the unique person they are, with meaningful conversation and activities that they actively look forward to and enjoy.







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To make an enquiry please call: 0800 994 9041

Unit 3 Devonshire Business Park, Chester Road, Borehamwood WD6 1NA

Head Office: 020 8953 7600 | www.westgatehealthcare.co.uk

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