

# Helping support people with dementia

The more people understand about dementia and talk about it... the more attitudes will change



# Foreword

Communities across Gloucestershire are becoming more dementia-friendly, showing their support so that people living with dementia remain active members of their community.

This booklet offers some tips and information as well as links to support and advice for those living with dementia in Gloucestershire, their families, friends and the communities they live in.

We are very grateful to dementia campaigner Norman 'Norrms' McNamara for sharing his personal experiences in writing these tips. Norrms was diagnosed with dementia at the age of 50.



Working together in

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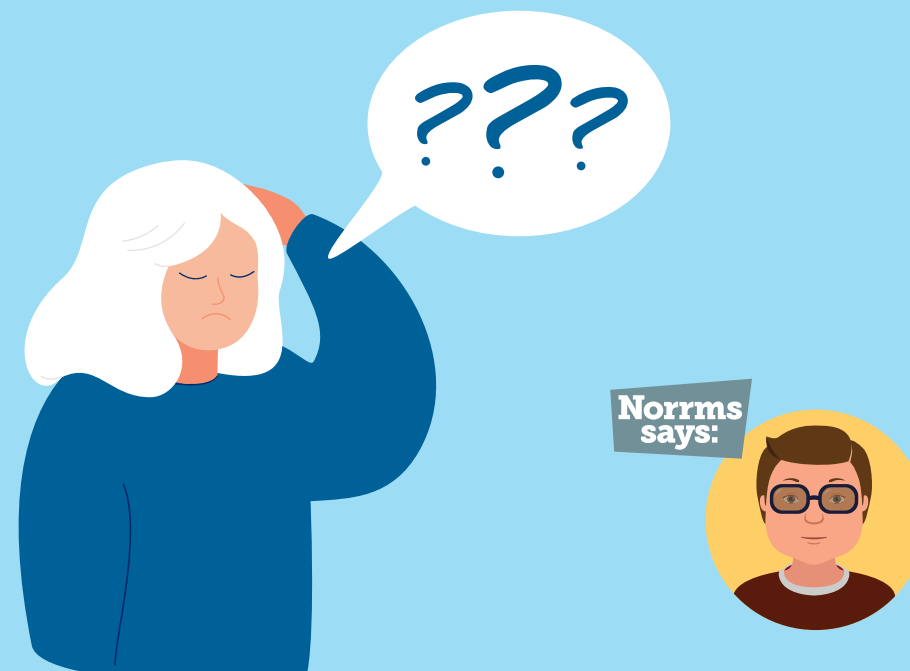
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## Confusion, standing and staring

People with dementia sometimes stand and stare. It can look like they are daydreaming, or just a bit bewildered; some may also experience confusion and a short attention span.

People may also experience memory loss – not the sort of lapses we all have occasionally, like forgetting what we went upstairs for, but consistent difficulties with remembering.



// *A reassuring smile or a helping hand to guide the person to what they are looking for will help. If they can easily see what they want, that will often relieve anxiety.*

// *Good, clear signs using pictures, colours and diagrams as well as words in shops, on streets and in reception areas can be really helpful.*

## Difficulties with space and movement

Sometimes people with dementia can misjudge space or have difficulty moving; they can lose their sense of space, bump into things or look very unsure about where to put their next step. A person may reach out for something and not quite understand why they haven't been able to get what they want. Sometimes people get frustrated and angry because they can't do what they once could.



// *Clear signs or directions, a convenient chair for the person to sit down and collect their thoughts – these can really help them regain their composure.*

*If someone appears distressed, offer to sit with them for a few moments.*

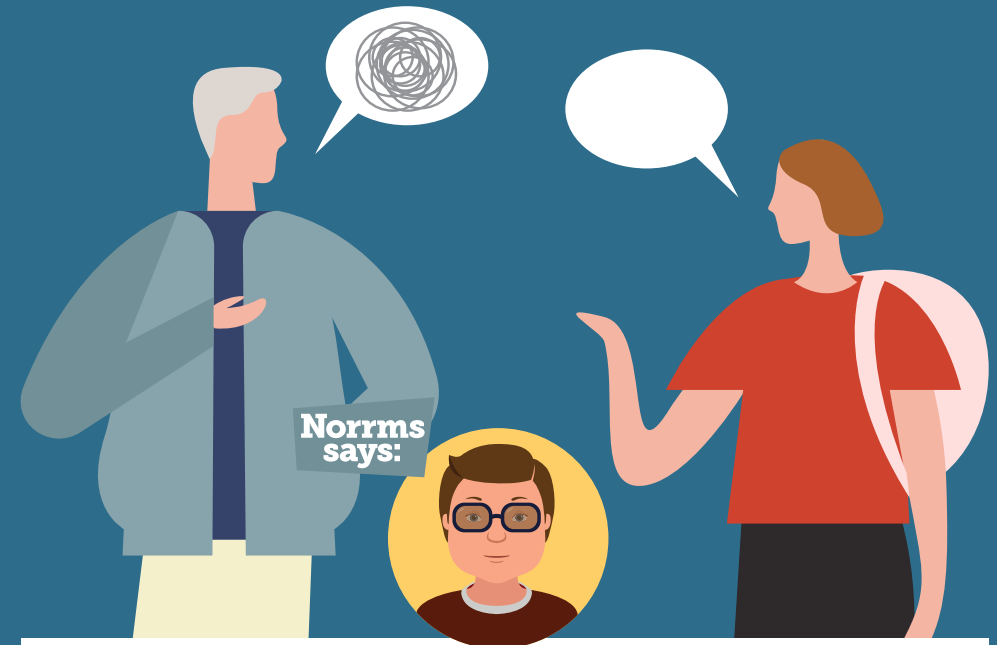
*This can help the person feel safe in a world which can appear complex and challenging.*

*Don't take it personally if the person expresses frustration towards you... it can be hard to feel like you are not able to do things.*

## Talking and communicating

Sometimes people with dementia repeat themselves – this is due to memory difficulties which create problems with registering what was said, and then difficulty in recalling the information. The person may stammer, stutter or struggle really hard to find the right words.

Sometimes, if people with dementia are upset or frustrated, they may not make sense, using the wrong words or phrases. Or they may have difficulty understanding what YOU say. Verbal communication can be difficult for some people with dementia.



// *Make sure you face the person when you are talking. Give the person time – don't fill in the missing word unless you have to.*

// *Try to find other ways to communicate - perhaps show the person an item, and then ask them to point to the one they want. Sometimes using gestures or making a drawing can aid communication.*

## Repetitiveness

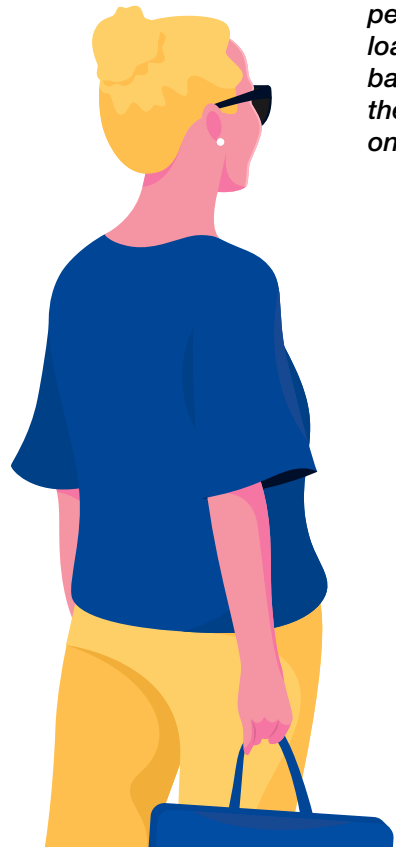
As well as repeating words or phrases, people with dementia sometimes repeat the same action – such as putting several of the same items in a basket or trolley, or going back to the bank for the third time in a day to withdraw the same amount of money.

**//** *Dementia causes people to have difficulty in learning and remembering, so it would be helpful to gently explain to the person they have three loaves of bread in their basket - do they want them all? Could you put one loaf back?*

**//** *If the person keeps appearing in your shop or business, gently tell them each time that they were there earlier and explain what they did. Consider writing a note with the date and time they were there, and what they did.*

*Ask the person to keep the note, and if they arrive again on the same day, ask them to read the note in their pocket or bag.*

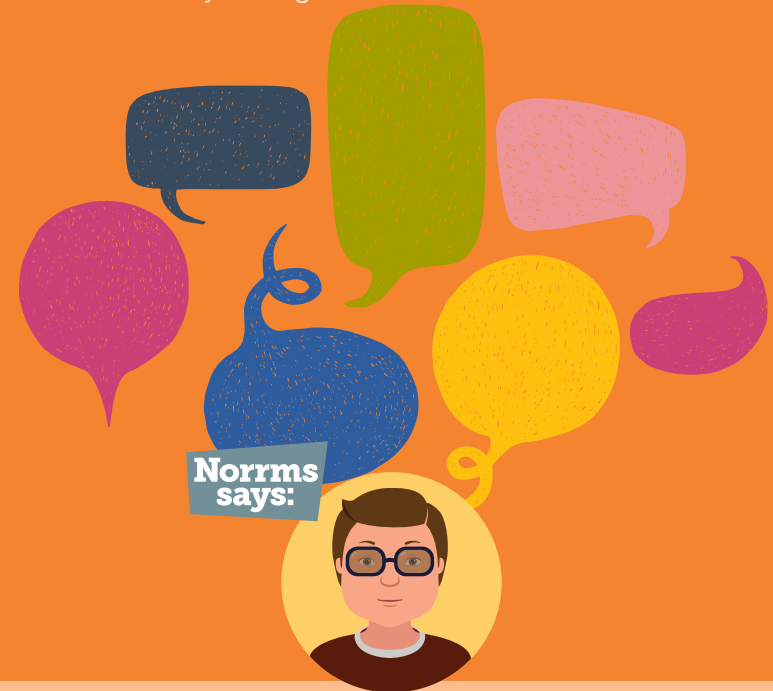
**Norrms says:**



## Talking about dementia

Some people with dementia don't mind who know about their dementia (for example, Norrms, who wrote these tips!) while others may be embarrassed or in denial. Dementia is a disability of the mind, just as cancer is a disease of the body.

Dementia is not age-related, although more older people live with dementia. The first person diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease was a 52-year-old woman more than 100 years ago.



**Norrms says:**

**//** *It's your approach that matters. Be open and honest where you can. Don't ask someone if they have dementia. Don't laugh if someone tells you they have dementia.*

**//** *If someone TELLS YOU they have dementia, ask them what kind of dementia. Knowing that it is Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia, for example, can help you to ask the right questions, such as: tell me what helps you?*

# Other challenges for people with dementia

Norrms says:



## Transport

- // *Make sure routes are clearly displayed on the bus. If you notice a person who looks confused walking aimlessly around a car park, or up and down a street looking for their car, suggest they check their pockets to find the car keys and then click the fob which may help them to find their car.*



## Managing money

- // *Sometimes a person with dementia has trouble understanding money - both coins and notes. They may struggle to grasp what they have to do. Patience and understanding will help enormously.*

*If the person holds out some money in their hand, gently take the correct amount and encourage the person to put their change away safely.*



## Checkouts

- // *Offer to switch off the conveyor belt or consider setting up a designated aisle or 'slow lane' for people who are not in a hurry or who may find the scanning process overwhelming.*



Norrms says:



- // *Thank you for your understanding and please remember, the person who is having these difficult times in front of you could one day be you.*

# Further information

## What is dementia?

Dementia is a word used to describe a progressive loss in being able to:

- Remember recent events
- Make decisions
- Find the right words
- Carry out everyday tasks
- Solve problems

## What are the diseases?

Different diseases come under the word dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia and Lewy body disease.

## Similar symptoms?

Other diseases and illnesses – such as depression or an untreated infection – can have similar symptoms including confusion, poor short term memory, slowed responses, withdrawal. In some of these cases, if treated, the person can regain wellness.

Although a healthy lifestyle can reduce our risks of developing dementia, evidence shows that dementia can affect anyone. Although dementia is not age-related, the longer we live, the higher our chances of developing dementia-related diseases.

## What's a healthy lifestyle?

- Eating a healthy diet low in saturated fats and high in fruit and vegetables
- Regular physical and mental exercises, such as walking, swimming, cycling, crosswords or TV quiz shows... all help reduce cholesterol & maintain a healthy blood pressure as well as exercise the nerve cells in our brains.

**Managing Memory Together** has learning opportunities to help you find out more about dementia and local support. There is free training for you and a family member or friend, learning with others who also live with a dementia-related disease, in a safe and welcoming environment.

Telephone advice and education programmes for people with dementia and their carers

**Tel:** 0800 694 8800

**Email:** [managingmemory@ghc.nhs.uk](mailto:managingmemory@ghc.nhs.uk)

**Web:** [www.ghc.nhs.uk/our-teams-and-services/managing-memory-together/](http://www.ghc.nhs.uk/our-teams-and-services/managing-memory-together/)

### Gloucestershire Alzheimer's Society

Information and support services for people with dementia and their carers:

**Tel:** 01452 525222

**Web:** [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

### Gloucestershire Carers Hub

Information, advice and advocacy services for carers

**Tel:** 0300 111 9000

**Web:** [www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk](http://www.gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk)

### Dementia UK

Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline

**Tel:** 0800 888 6678

**Email:** [helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

## Want to find out more?

Talk to your GP who can, if necessary, refer you to Gloucestershire's Memory Assessment Services. If you, or someone you care about, receive a diagnosis of a dementia-related disease, you can discuss the treatments, plan for a future you all want and get help and support from your community. See the back page for more information.

# Notes