

Ask 'Doctor D'

about dementia



Ask 'Doctor D' is your opportunity to put questions people often want answers to, but don't like to ask, to the doctors based at St. Andrews.

Dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term for various forms of neurological impairment which affect memory and create difficulties in thinking. It is progressive. It can affect both men and women: women are more likely to develop **Alzheimer's**, whilst men tend to develop **Vascular dementia**.

You can reduce your risk of dementia by not smoking, maintaining a healthy diet, taking regular exercise and reducing alcohol intake; and by keeping socially active, your brain active with puzzles, quizzes or reading etc.

Cognitive impairment 'versus' dementia

Cognitive impairment is when people have minor problems with their memory. They are deemed to be worse than would be considered typical for their age, not however, severe enough to interfere significantly with daily life, in which event it is termed **dementia**.

Types of dementia

Alzheimer's dementia is the most common type of dementia in the UK. It usually progresses slowly, presenting with poor memory and inability to recall recent events. This can be concealed by increased dependency on routine, and reliance upon others.

As the condition progresses individuals struggle with decision making and managing financial affairs becomes impossible; language can also be affected, with individuals finding difficulty naming objects, or having word-finding problems.

Vascular dementia results from small strokes damaging the brain over time, and presents in a step-wise decline: individuals show problems with organization, and problem solving; they struggle to concentrate, their thought process appears slower and their speech may be less fluent.

Memory problems appear later in this type of dementia. Individuals also experience mood

changes in the form of depression or anxiety and are generally more emotional, with rapid mood swings.

Fronto-temporal dementia is a less common form of dementia and mainly affects behaviour and personality. It presents earlier, around the ages 45-65 years. Individuals lose their inhibitions, interest in, and empathy with others.

Lewy bodie dementia sufferers may display movement disorder such as shuffling and falling. Memory tends to be less affected, but they can experience bouts of confusion, and altered sleeping patterns, sleeping in the day, and disrupted at night.

10% of patients are diagnosed with a mixed dementia: usually Alzheimer's with vascular dementia.

Understanding the challenges for someone with dementia

Individuals living with dementia may have difficulty word-finding and following conversations, especially in a busy environment. They may not be able to recognize emotions or understand humour. They may repeat a conversation due to memory problems and become stressed trying to process the information.

When talking to individuals with memory impairment, try to smile speaking slowly and clearly, this will put the individual at ease, give them time to answer; use gestures to help further communication maintaining eye contact. Try not to offer choices or open questions.

Other Doctor D advice leaflets

Go to Forms and Leaflets on our website - www.standrewsmc-southborough.nhs.uk