

## Contact us

For further information or advice, please contact a member of staff or contact:

Alzheimer's Society  
South West Area Office International House  
Bank Road  
Kingswood  
Bristol  
BS15 8LX  
**0117 967 2975**

[alzheimers.org.uk/factsheets](http://alzheimers.org.uk/factsheets)

## PALS

To make a comment, raise a concern or make a complaint, please contact the Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

Tel: 01225 362900  
Freephone: 0800 073 1778  
Email: [awp.pals@nhs.net](mailto:awp.pals@nhs.net)

## Other formats and languages

If you need this information in other formats (such as large print, Braille) or in another language, please call the PALS number.

Lead: Modern Matron  
Leaflet code: AWP Aug 2010-165  
Last review: Aug 2013  
Next review: Aug 2020



Avon and Wiltshire Mental  
Health Partnership  
NHS Trust

# Alzheimer's Disease

**Some basic information for people  
and their families**

## **What is Alzheimer's disease?**

Alzheimer's disease is a common form of dementia, which causes a loss of mental abilities such as memory, judgment and reasoning.

## **What causes the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease?**

Alzheimer's disease is a condition where amyloid plaques (lumps) made of protein form in the brain. These plaques and the nerve tangles that also occur, prevent the nerves working properly. The chemicals (neuro-transmitters) that link the nerves together are also produced in smaller amounts. As a result, the brain isn't able to work properly.

Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, which means that gradually over time, more nerves in the brain are damaged. As this happens, the symptoms become more severe.

## **Symptoms**

The person may experience lapses of memory, problems finding the right words, disorientation and confusion, forgetting the names of people, places, appointments and recent events. The person may also experience mood swings, may feel sad or angry, or may feel scared and frustrated by the increasing memory loss.

## **Stages of the illness**

### **Early-stage Alzheimer's disease**

At this stage, the symptoms are mild and may include problems remembering recent events and a tendency to be more withdrawn than usual. These symptoms may be noticed by friends and family. At this stage, people are usually able to live independently and can compensate for many of the symptoms they are experiencing.

### **Mid-stage Alzheimer's disease**

By this stage, the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease have become more pronounced. The person may require assistance with some activities of daily living, such as dressing, eating and using the bathroom.

They may be unable to remember essential information about themselves such as their current address or telephone number. They may also be confused about where they are and what day, month or year it is. They may begin to experience signs of personality and behavioural changes.

At this stage, they may or may not have a problem remembering their own name or the names of their family members

### **Late-stage Alzheimer's disease**

At this stage of the disease, symptoms become severe.

The person usually requires constant support with most daily functions and may have lost the ability to use or understand language. They may also be unable to recognise members of their family or remember their own name.

They may have lost many aspects of motor function, requiring assistance to sit, walk and support their head. Swallowing may become impaired, increasing the risk of choking or of developing pneumonia.

## **What causes Alzheimer's disease?**

So far, no one single factor has been identified as the cause for Alzheimer's disease. It is likely that a combination of factors, including age, other physical illnesses, genetic inheritance, environmental factors, diet and overall health are responsible.

For some, the disease may develop silently for many years before symptoms appear.