



Dementia

Dementia describes different brain disorders that trigger a loss of brain function. These conditions are all usually progressive. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, affecting 62 per cent of those diagnosed. There are 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK; of these, 40,000 are younger than 65.

Symptoms can include:

- Memory Loss.
- Difficulty with communication and reasoning skills.
- Changes in emotional behaviour (becoming sad, angry).
- Disorientation (confusion about time and place even in familiar surroundings).

Treatment focuses on slowing the progression of the disease and maintaining the individual's quality of life.

Social isolation is known to exacerbate the symptoms of people living with dementia; the U3A can therefore make an important contribution to the individual's wellbeing.

Making your U3A dementia-friendly

The understanding and support of the broad membership of the U3A is needed to create a dementia-friendly environment.

Key Messages

- Hope: people living with dementia can have a good quality of life, provided they remain involved in every-day life including going to their U3A.
- Dignity: Be aware that dementia does not equate with loss of intellect and everybody is affected differently

- Understanding: Being unable to communicate something important is frustrating – especially so when this is due to memory loss or reasoning processes.
- Be a Friend: If you know someone with dementia, treat them as you always have done, show that you are pleased to see them or perhaps share a joke.

Actions

- A small amount of knowledge can enable a great amount of change.
- Think about the family members and carers and how you can support them.
- See if you can persuade at least one member to become a Dementia Friend's Champion.
- If you have a carer/family member amongst your members, ask them to share their experiences.
- Organise a Dementia Friends awareness session. More information is available on dementiafriends.org.uk.

Members on their own

Most U3As have a significant number of members who live on their own and it is possible that the symptoms of dementia will first be noticed by friends at the U3A. If you are worried about someone's memory suggest they [read the Alzheimer's Society leaflet 'Worried About Your Memory?'](#) and see if you can persuade the person to see their GP and offer to go with them. If possible contact a relative. Bear in mind the person may be anxious and quite frightened about this as they may be aware that they are having some difficulties.

Making Open Meetings accessible

- Encourage the member to bring a family member or carer along with them.
- Have clear signage – for coffee, toilets etc.
- Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing, it is better to be friendly than to not speak at all, use clear and uncomplicated language.

Making Interest Groups accessible

- Use people's names more than usual so the member knows who's who.
- Explain the format of the group and what is going to happen in the session
- Be patient.
- Encourage all group members to be welcoming.
- Occasionally changes in someone's behaviour may cause an issue; if this happens try to lead the member to a quiet space and sort it out in a positive manner with little fuss.

Simple ways you can help people with dementia

- Offer reassurance and understanding – put someone experiencing difficulties at ease.
- Communicate clearly – listen carefully and use simple, short sentences when speaking to someone with dementia.
- Be aware of the surroundings – noisy or busy environments can make people with dementia uneasy or add to their confusion. Consider how features of the environment may affect someone.
- Ensure any signage is clear and people can find what they want easily.