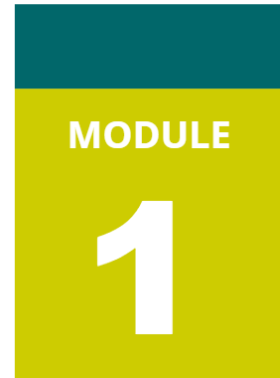


iSupport For Dementia Carers

Module 1 Introduction to dementia



INTRODUCTION TO DEMENTIA

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Introduction to dementia

Why is this session important?

Dementia is a disease that can be overwhelming for the person with dementia, but also for you as a carer. There are many myths about dementia and learning more will help explain some common misunderstandings.

How will this session help me?

This session helps you to understand the basics of what dementia is and how it affects someone. This information is essential when you are a carer.

What will I learn?

1. What is dementia?
2. What causes dementia?
3. What happens to people with dementia as the disease progresses?
4. What to do if you think that the person you care for has dementia?
5. How to reach out for help?
6. What is the focus of this programme?

1. What is dementia?

Dementia occurs as a result of a disease process that increasingly damages the brain over time. Dementia affects all groups of society and is not linked to social class, gender, ethnic group, or geographical location. Dementia is not a part of normal ageing. Although dementia is more common among older people, younger people can also be affected.

2. What causes dementia?

Dementia is caused by a number of diseases which destroy nerve cells and damage the brain, as outlined below.

Alzheimer's disease

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. It destroys brain cells and nerves, disrupting the transmitters that carry messages in the brain, particularly those responsible for storing memories.

Vascular dementia

Vascular dementia occurs where blood vessels are damaged, the supply of oxygen to the brain fails and as a result, brain cells die. The symptoms of vascular dementia can occur either suddenly, following a stroke, or over time, through a series of small strokes. Vascular dementia accounts for 20%-30% of all cases of dementia.

Dementia with Lewy bodies

Dementia with Lewy bodies is similar to Alzheimer's disease in that it is caused by deteriorating and dying nerve cells in the brain. It takes its name from abnormal deposits of protein - Lewy bodies - in the nerve cells of the brain. It may account for around 10% of all cases of dementia. Approximately half the people with Lewy body disease also develop signs and symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

Fronto-temporal dementia

In fronto-temporal dementia - including Pick's disease - damage is usually concentrated in the front part of the brain. In the beginning, personality and behaviour are more affected than memory.

Rarer causes of dementia

There are many other rarer causes of dementia, such as alcohol-related dementia and dementia due to HIV/AIDS.

3. What happens to people with dementia as the disease progresses?

Every person is unique, and dementia affects people differently. No two people will develop the same difficulties in exactly the same way. It is not just the brain damage that determines how dementia affects someone, but also other factors including an individual's personality, life course, general health and functioning, and living environment.

1. Check your understanding

What happens to people with dementia?

People with dementia often forget things or have trouble with their memory. Select the correct answer.

- True
- False

1. Check your understanding

What happens to people with dementia?

People with dementia often forget things or have trouble with their memory. Select the correct answer.

- ✓ True: This is the correct answer.
- ✗ False: This is the incorrect answer.

The right answer is that people with dementia often forget things or have trouble with their memory.

Dementia has stages



Dementia symptoms can range from minor memory loss to severe difficulties in memory and thinking that make it impossible to manage daily activities without help. It can be helpful to view dementia as a series of stages to understand the illness. However, it is important to realise that this only provides a rough guide to the progress of dementia. Not all people with dementia will have all symptoms and some of the symptoms may only appear at one stage of the disease.

In the early stage of the disease, people with dementia may have memory problems, become disoriented with respect to time, lost in familiar places and show difficulties making decisions.

As dementia progresses to the middle stage, people with dementia may become very forgetful and in need of help with daily activities such as shopping, dressing, and washing.

In the late stage, people with dementia may not recognise relatives or friends anymore and may display changes in behaviour which can be upsetting and distressing to the person with dementia and those around them.

1. Activity

Here are some common things that may happen to people with dementia.

Do you think that your family member/friend/the person that you care for experiences any of the following?

Please select all that apply.

Does the person you care for...		Examples
Have trouble remembering things that happened minutes before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Forgetting recent events</i>• <i>Repeating questions</i>
Find it difficult to perform daily activities?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Managing money</i>• <i>Shopping</i>• <i>Preparing dinner</i>
Struggle to identify time or place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Forgetting the date and time of appointments</i>
Communicate differently than they did before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Difficulty expressing oneself</i>• <i>Difficulty finding the right words</i>
Misplace things?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Not finding common objects, such as keys</i>• <i>Suspecting things are stolen</i>
Withdraw socially?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Showing decline in social activity</i>• <i>Lacking the urge to do something</i>
Show changes in feelings or personality?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Having a lot of ups and downs</i>• <i>Becoming more anxious than before</i>

4. What to do if you think that the person you care for has dementia?

If you think that a family member or friend may have dementia, a good first step is to make sure that they see a medical doctor. The doctor will examine their body and brain functioning.

One important point to rule out is whether the person's memory problems are caused by other treatable conditions such as depression, urinary tract infection, medication side effects, lack of vitamins or a brain tumour.

It is important to identify whether the person's memory problems are really part of dementia or are part of something else. Only a medical doctor can do this, not this course.

2. Check your understanding

What to do if you think that the person you care for has dementia?

What is the first step if you think that a family member or friend has dementia?

Please put a check mark on the answers that you think are correct.

First steps

- Call a friend or relative.
- Use iSupport alone for help.
- Call a medical doctor's surgery and make an appointment.
- The person has been to a medical doctor already and has been diagnosed with dementia.

2. Check your understanding

What to do if you think that the person you care for has dementia?

What is the first step if you think that a family member or friend has dementia?

Please put a check mark on the answers that you think are correct.

First steps

✗ Call a friend or relative

While friends and family can offer support, this cannot replace a medical exam given by a qualified medical doctor.

✗ Use iSupport alone for help

While this programme provides information and support, it cannot replace a medical exam given by a qualified medical doctor.

✓ Call a medical doctor's surgery and make an appointment

This is the best first step if you have not done so already.

✓ The person has been to a medical doctor already and has been diagnosed with dementia

You have already completed the first important step.

5. How to reach out for help?

It is important to realise that you, alone, are not going to be able to provide all the care that the person living with dementia needs, especially not as things get more complex over time. So, we encourage you to reach out to family members, friends, and professional organizations or services for help.

In many countries there are several resources that are very helpful. Some are free whilst others are not. Please contact your local Alzheimer's Society for information, support and care that is available in your area and could benefit the person you care for as well as yourself.

6. What is the focus of this programme?

The focus is on you, a carer of someone with dementia.

Dementia can be overwhelming. For this reason, iSupport provides you with support to cope with caregiving on a day-to-day basis. It is really important that you not only take care of the person living with dementia but also take care of yourself. iSupport will show you how. It will also show you some common scenarios which may happen with people with dementia so that you are aware and can practice how to respond to such situations.

[Alzheimer's Society](#) webpage is a good place to start to find local support.

Keep in Mind

- Dementia affects a person's brain.
- Dementia is common, especially in older people.
- Dementia is a disease, not a part of ageing.
- As a first step it is important to see a medical doctor, if possible.
- It is important for you to take care of yourself, not only the person you care for.
- iSupport can support you as a carer.

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