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What is Dementia?

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a range of progressive conditions affecting the brain. There are many different types of dementia, of which Alzheimer's disease is the most common. Some people may have a combination of types of dementia. Regardless of which type is diagnosed, each person will experience their dementia in their own unique way.

If you or someone close to you is experiencing problems with memory, confusion or changes in behaviour, it is important that you consult your GP as soon as possible. Diagnosis may seem scary, but there are many benefits to getting one sooner rather than later. The symptoms may not be caused by dementia at all, but if they are, then early access to advice and care can make a huge difference. Some GPs are dementia trained and there are also Memory Clinics around the country and a referral to these can be extremely helpful especially as they can tap into available resources in your area.

Financial support at this time can be helpful, but again this varies depending on where you live. In some areas there can be a reduction in Council Tax for those with

dementia. Ensure that you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to and Age UK, Dementia UK and Independent Age can all provide you with information regarding this.

If your GP is unable to make a diagnosis or refer you to a Memory Service or Clinic, you can speak to one of the Admiral Nurses on the Dementia Helpline **(0800 888 6678)** and they may be able to give you the expert support you need.

Sleep disturbance is common among people with dementia and can become more problematic as the condition progresses. Someone diagnosed with dementia can become increasingly restless, confused, agitated, or distressed, particularly as the sun is setting and it becomes dark outside. This is known as 'sundowning'. Pain is also a major contributor to sleep disturbance and is commonly unrecognised and under treated in people with dementia. If you suspect the person with dementia may be in pain contact your GP.

How an Admiral Nurse can help

Admiral Nurses provide specialist dementia support and are a lifeline to thousands of families dealing with dementia every day.

Either face to face, or on the end of the Dementia Helpline, an Admiral Nurse has both the experience and expertise to answer even the most challenging questions as well as offer practical solutions that can make all the difference when living with dementia. It is important that the home is made dementia friendly and safe. Details as to this can be found on the Dementia UK website.

Looking after a person with dementia who also has an ileostomy

Even though a person has been looking after their ileostomy independently for many years they may forget how or when to empty or change their appliance. They may also become extremely anxious about

it and empty or change the appliance inappropriately. This can create hygiene issues which can be very upsetting for the ostomist as well as their carers.

It may be helpful to leave around the house reminders of when to empty, and in the bathroom, step by step instructions on how to empty the appliance. These notices should be in large print and be laminated so that they can be wiped clean. Keeping to a routine can be helpful for some but many do not respond to this.

Repetition can be helpful as can breaking down tasks into simple steps. Supervising emptying and changing the appliance for a number of times, and then gradually standing back until independence is

Advert intentionally removed

achieved may be helpful. Remember that dementia may progress quite swiftly and therefore this regime may have to be repeated frequently.

In the bathroom the toilet seat lid could be removed so that there is less chance of forgetting to lift it. All clutter should also be removed and toilet paper etc should be readily accessible. The flooring should also be easily cleaned as should the walls.

Clothing should be easily removed so that the appliance is readily accessible unless the ostomist is 'fiddling' with their appliance unnecessarily. If this is the case then maybe adding net pants, worn under normal underwear, can be a deterrent.

Regarding changing the appliance, again reminders and instructions should be placed in the bathroom. It may be that this should only be done with supervision. If the appliance is being interfered with then adding a belt to the regime can be helpful.

In some areas NHS carers will be able to assist the ostomist with caring for their stoma and this should be checked with your local health authority. Again this depends on which part of the UK care is required. Adult Social Care Departments

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provide help in many areas and those with dementia should be classed as having a high need for care. Caring for a stoma is an activity of daily living and therefore assistance should be available, but this may have to be paid for depending on savings, income etc.

Sometimes it can be difficult when supporting or caring for a family member living with dementia to make any time for you. It may be that just thinking of spending time away causes feelings of guilt. However taking a break may help you to feel more refreshed or better able to manage competing priorities in your life, and can be important for your own health and wellbeing.

Patients with dementia are best served when nurses specialising in stoma care and those specialising in dementia bring their skills together and this is something you should endeavour to attain.

Thank you to the Dementia UK website for information which has been included in this article. www.dementiauk.org