

As we get older, a common complaint is changes in memory however this is a normal part of ageing and not necessarily dementia. Dementia refers to conditions that cause increasing difficulties in thinking and brain functions, affecting a person's daily functioning. There are many different types of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease the most common. Often dementia causes changes in memory and concentration but there are a variety of changes that people with dementia might experience, such as in speed of thinking, word finding, problem solving, coordination, memory recall behaviour and mood.

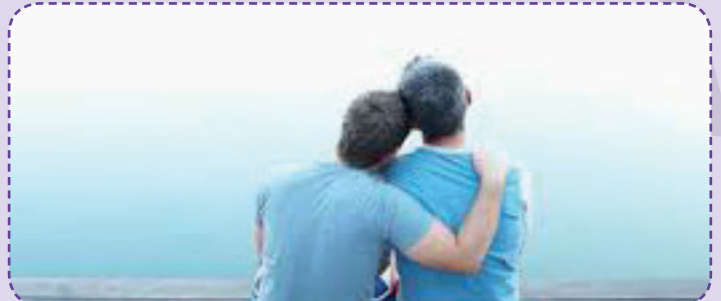
Who is affected by Dementia?

Dementia is not a natural progression of the ageing process.

- It is more common in older populations, particularly in their 80's.
- 1 in 10 people between 65 and 85 years of age will develop some form of dementia.
- It's not any more common in LGBTI people than in the general population.
- People with HIV who are not on treatment are at higher risk.
- Most people with dementia are older, but it is important to remember that not all older people get dementia.

A good social life helps reduce risk of developing Dementia.

LGBTI people are at greater risk of social isolation, and lost family connections. However attempting to improve social connectivity through a range of different groups and activities can have profound health benefits both mentally and physically.



Keeping healthy and active helps reduce risk of developing Dementia

Combining physical activity, a healthy diet and avoiding smoking appear to be among the best preventative measures against dementia. Physical fitness improves blood flow to the brain and stimulates the growth of new brain cells, helping to maintain cognitive health. It is important to be monitored regularly by a health professional if you have any cardiovascular illness, such as blood pressure or cholesterol problems. Reducing drug and alcohol intake is also recommended.

Managing Dementia

Diagnosing early signs of dementia is easier nowadays. If you have any concerns regarding a change in your memory or other thinking functions discuss these with your doctor.

- There are lots of possible reasons for memory complaints (e.g. depression, various medical conditions, sleeping problems) and your doctor can consider possible causes and any treatable problems.
- If you think you may be at risk of deteriorating cardiovascular conditions, check in with your doctor to discuss available treatments. Your doctor can also monitor your vascular risk factors and work out a strategy for a healthier active lifestyle.

HIV and Dementia

Most people with HIV will not develop dementia. For those with HIV not taking antiretroviral medications, HIV-associated dementia has about a 7% occurrence. While HIV doesn't directly affect the nerve cells, it has been shown to attack immune cells present in the brain and cause indirect damage to nerve cells. A percentage of people with HIV do experience some milder changes in their cognitive function, which do not necessarily lead to dementia.

The good news is that antiretroviral therapies are available and can be highly effective at reducing symptoms, particularly if treated early. So discuss any concerns with your doctor. If you haven't tested for HIV already, rapid testing now makes it easier and quicker than ever.

Caring for yourself and others

It's okay to reach out for help if you have anxiety about being lonely. Dementia can be difficult to manage for the person experiencing symptoms and carers as well. If you have a loved one who is showing signs of dementia, it's also important to take care of yourself. Seek out personal supports including family or friends and access professional services.

Resources

ACON
acon.org.au

Including Older Persons' Legal Service.
tars.com.au

Alzheimer's Australia
fightdementia.org.au

"Your Brain Matters" a guide to healthy hearts and minds.
yourbrainmatters.org.au

Advanced Care Directive Association. Legal support setting up a will, advanced care directive and enduring guardianship.
advancecaredirectives.org.au

Planning Ahead Tools 'Get it in Black and White'.
planningaheadtools.com.au

HIV/AIDS Legal Centre (NSW). Legal information for people with HIV
halc.org.au

Recognizing symptoms of Dementia.
isitdementia.com.au

a(TEST) Fast, free and confidential rapid HIV and STI testing.
endinghiv.org.au/test-more/a-test/

National LGBTI Health Alliance
lgbthealth.org.au

Dementia in Australia - Australian Institute of Health
aihw.gov.au

Share the LOVE

Empowering LGBTI seniors to lead healthy, active and social lives. ACON aims to reduce discrimination by providing LGBTI training and support to aged care services

facebook.com/LivingOlderVisiblyEngaged | twitter.com/LOVEprojectACON | loveproject.org.au

Publication date: September 2014

This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

