

DEMENTIA DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE KNOW THE SIGNS



It is estimated that by the year 2050 nearly one million Australians will be living with dementia. That means nearly 100,000 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Australians will be too...and the many others who will be caring for them - partners, friends and other family members.

For many LGBTI people, the prospect of ageing let alone developing dementia and becoming more dependent on others, including community and residential health and aged care services is very scary indeed.

True, there is not a lot of good news about dementia. It can strike as early as your fifties, is more common the older people are, can run in families, is usually progressive and ultimately is terminal. However, while there is no cure there are ways to manage and treat it. Importantly there are a lot of people spending their working lives researching dementia and there is every cause for hope. Moreover, there is a lot of help and support out there through Alzheimer's Australia.

Thinking it will never happen to you will achieve nothing and for LGBTI people, or those caring for them it may even compound the problems you may face if you do develop dementia.

WHAT ARE THE EARLY SIGNS OF DEMENTIA?

Some early changes you may notice that happen more than once and gradually get worse are:

People

- Having increasing difficulty remembering people's names, when you don't normally forget them
- Problems knowing who people are when you see them regularly.

Place (and time)

- Getting lost in a place you know well
- Difficulty knowing how to get somewhere, when you normally always know the way
- Difficulty keeping appointments or times that you usually don't miss.

Past

- Having trouble remembering recent things, like what you ate for breakfast
- Forgetting recent conversations.

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Processes

- Problems with remembering how to do things, like your hobbies or playing sport
- Having difficulty doing everyday tasks, like the washing or shopping
- Trouble following instructions, such as following a recipe.
- Forgetting how to turn something on or off, like the iron or kettle
- Trouble finding the right words.

Personality

- Withdrawing from your community or family and friends
- Keeping to yourself more
- Losing interest in things you always enjoyed.

Of course, other possible underlying causes of these symptoms may have to be ruled out first. See your doctor and if need be you can refer you on for a specialist assessment. Or telephone the **National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500**. With dementia, early diagnosis means you can access and try the available treatments.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO THEN?

First

Do all you can to reduce your risk of getting dementia by:

1. Looking after your heart. What's good for your heart has got to be good for the brain.
2. Regularly doing some kind of physical activity, like walking or swimming.
3. Mentally challenging your brain. Why not learn a new language or skill?
4. Following a healthy and balanced diet; and
5. Staying in touch with others and enjoying social activity.

Second

Don't ignore or gloss over the early warning signs or symptoms in yourself or others. Get them checked out. What you are experiencing may not be 'just a normal part of getting older'.

Third

The third thing you can do about dementia is to think and act to future proof your care and those you care about. This is the area of the Advanced (Health) Care Directive, Power of Attorney, Enduring Power of Guardianship, Medical Power of Attorney and the valid Will. What exactly you need will vary a little from state to state in Australia.

If you are unable to make those decisions for yourself, because of dementia or some other incapacity, who do you want to plan and decide on your care or be involved in those arrangements? Who do you want handling your finances? Who do you want to handle your funeral arrangements?

If nothing is in place, much of this decision making will often end up being made by your next of biological kin. Is that what you want to happen? And because dementia is a progressive disease, you need to have put these things in place while you are still considered cognitively and legally able to do so.

FOR INFORMATION, CHECK OUT:

- **The Alzheimer's Australia website:**
www.fightdementia.org.au
- **The Safe Return website:**
www.safereturn.org.au
- **The online video suite, Is It Dementia:**
www.isitdementia.com.au
- **The Start2Talk website:**
www.start2talk.org.au
- **The Your Brain Matters website:**
www.yourbrainmatters.org.au
- **Download the free 'BrainyApp'**
developed in partnership with Bupa Health Foundation:
www.yourbrainmatters.org.au/download-brainyapp-today-free

Alzheimer's Australia welcomes and supports everyone, regardless of sex, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status and is a proud member of the National LGBTI Health Alliance. The LGBTI Project is an Australian Government initiative.

**FIGHT ALZHEIMER'S
SAVE AUSTRALIA**
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