Caring for someone with dementia

If you are caring for a person with dementia you will want to ensure that they are always treated with respect and dignity. They are a unique and valuable human being.

A person with dementia, whose mental abilities are declining, is likely to feel vulnerable and in need of reassurance and support. It is important that those around them do everything they can to help them to retain their sense of identity and their feeling of self-worth. Such people will need to remember that:

- Each person with dementia is a unique individual with their own very different experiences of life, their own needs and feelings and their own likes and dislikes.

- Although there are symptoms of dementia which are common to everyone, each person will be affected by their dementia in a different way.

- Everyone reacts to the experience of dementia in an individual way. The experience means different things to different people.

Those caring for a person with dementia will need to take account of their abilities, interests and preferences. They need to be aware that these things may change as the dementia progresses. They should be prepared to respond in a flexible and sensitive way.

The person with dementia needs to feel respected and valued for what they are now, as well as for who they were in the past. It helps if those caring are:

- Flexible and tolerant.
- Can make time to listen and have a chat and enjoy being with the person.
- Can show affection as appropriate.

This leaflet was compiled with information from the Alzheimer’s Society.
For more information call the Alzheimer’s Helpline 0845 300 0336
Can dementia be prevented?
At present we are not sure what causes most of the diseases that lead to dementia. However, the evidence seems to indicate that a healthy diet and lifestyle may protect against dementia. In particular, not smoking, exercising regularly, avoiding fatty foods and keeping mentally active into old age may help prevent us from developing vascular dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

How can I tell if I have dementia?
Many people fear they have dementia, particularly if they think their memory is getting worse.

Becoming forgetful does not necessarily mean that you have dementia. Memory loss can be an effect of ageing. It can also be a sign of stress or depression. In rare cases dementia-like symptoms can be caused by vitamin deficiencies and/or a brain tumour.

If you are worried about yourself, or someone close to you, it is worth discussing your concerns with your GP.