

Understanding and living well with Dementia



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What is dementia?

Dementia is not one specific disease. It describes a collection of symptoms caused by disorders affecting the brain.

It can affect thinking, memory and behaviour enough to interfere with a person's normal social or working life. It affects around 10 per cent of people over 65 and 30 per cent of people over 85.

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Reducing dementia risk

Risk factors for dementia include age, family history and lifestyle.

You can reduce the risk of dementia by looking after your body and your mind.

Keeping physically active increases blood flow to the brain and stimulates the growth of brain cells and connections. You can also look after your body by eating well, reducing stress and keeping a good sleep schedule and looking after your hearing with regular checks. Hearing other people clearly is an important part of understanding your environment and growing and maintaining important social connections.

You can look after your mind by staying social, varying your daily activities and learning new things.

Getting a diagnosis

Early signs of dementia can include memory loss, changes in planning or problem-solving abilities, trouble understanding visual cues like faces, depth and space, social withdrawal and mood changes.

Importantly, having these symptoms does not mean you have dementia. A number of conditions ranging from infections to vitamin or hormone deficiencies and medication effects can cause similar symptoms and may be easily treatable.

It's important to **talk to a doctor** about any symptoms to access support and information.

Tips for living with dementia

- Access support. There are excellent resources available for people with dementia and carers, including through [Dementia Australia](#) and through Bolton Clarke's [Information on Dementia talking book](#), which is available in English and Vietnamese.
- What's good for the body is good for the brain. Stay active with regular exercise: planned, structured and repetitive movement to improve or maintain physical fitness. Research shows [keeping active](#) with activities like [dancing](#) can be beneficial. [Healthy eating](#) is also important.
- Challenge your brain with activities like crosswords or a jigsaw puzzle. Make decisions together.
- Make your home an enabling environment. There are simple things you can do to support independence at home, from labels to using contrasting colours. You can find out more about making your home a dementia enabling environment [here](#).
- Try assistive technology. This can include everything from rails and mobility support to systems like the [Bolton Clarke InTouch](#) that use sensors to monitor movement around the house and let families know if patterns change.
- Use tools like [orientation clocks](#) to help people understand routines and undertake tasks like taking medication. Use photographs and memory prompts to start conversations.
- Keep routines as familiar as possible.

About Bolton Clarke

Bolton Clarke is the new face of RSL Care + RDNS. Together we have provided healthcare and aged care services for more than 200 years. We are one of the largest Australian owned and operated not-for-profit healthcare and independent living service providers with a passion for ensuring our customers live the best possible life.

We provide reliable, trustworthy, quality care and support and living options across retirement living residential care and at home support.

Living at home with dementia

Living with dementia doesn't mean giving up your independence, relationships or connections with your community. Families, carers, friends, and support people can help a person with dementia live independently and safely at home.

Nationally, Bolton Clarke supports more than 5000 home care clients with a formal diagnosis of dementia and others living with cognitive impairment. Bolton Clarke also has specialised Clinical Nurse Consultants to support people with dementia at home.

Dementia innovation

The Bolton Clarke Research Institute has a focus on research to support better outcomes for people with dementia.

Projects include:

- The ['Enabling Choices' conversation tool](#) is an evidence-informed conversation tool that has been developed with people with dementia and carers. It assists with negotiating risk around everyday activities between home care workers, people with dementia and their informal carers. The tool provides visual cues for conversations on topics such as self-care, mobility and driving.
- About 20 per cent of veterans have met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder in their lifetime, and people with a history of PTSD are at double the risk of developing dementia. [Weaving Evidence into Action for Veterans with dementia](#) worked with veterans with dementia and their families to co-design individual and group-based interventions to improve or maintain function capacity, improve mental health and reduce responsive behaviours. Interventions include therapeutic music, sensory modulation, reminiscence therapy through storytelling and structured exercise. Families, carers and residents have reported concrete impacts that have contributed to better wellbeing outcomes for veterans with dementia.
- Bolton Clarke Research Institute is working with [Flinders Caring Futures Institute](#) on the [Partnership in iSupport Program](#), which has been awarded \$1.4 million in support over four years in the Medical Research Future Fund's Dementia and Aging and Aged Care mission round. It involves key interventions including providing carers of people with dementia with a link worker who can help the carer navigate and access support. Carers will also have access to the Australian iSupport for Dementia program, an online resource to help develop coping skills, and to virtual carer support groups.