



Living alone

Living with
dementia series





TRAIL FINDER

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Living alone

Some people with dementia choose to live alone. You may feel happier and more in control in your own home, where you can keep your routines and stay in your community. Keeping your independence may also be important to you.

Some people live alone because of their circumstances. You may find yourself alone after a partner has died, or someone you lived with has moved out. You may not have a partner, family or friends you can move in with.

Everyone's situation will be different, but if you are living alone with dementia, then this booklet is for you. It outlines practical ways to manage some of the challenges you may come across, and the help and support that is available to you. By taking some of these small steps you can stay safe, in touch and independent for longer while living alone.

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‘I am still the same person that I was yesterday.’

Person living with dementia



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Health and wellbeing

Staying well and healthy will help you when you're living on your own. This includes both physical and mental health. Keeping active, seeing people and staying in touch can all help with your wellbeing and prevent you from feeling isolated.

A good support network

Having a good support network in place can really help. This can include family, friends, neighbours or professionals. They might offer help with practical things you find difficult, look out for your wellbeing, or just be there to talk and spend time with you.

Asking for and accepting help can be difficult. You may feel that it will stop you being independent. However, having people around who can help you if you need it will mean you can stay living alone for longer.

You may have lots of people who are there for you. But if you haven't, it can be a good idea to put support in place as soon as you feel ready. You might not need much help right now, but talking to people about your diagnosis as soon as you feel ready can be reassuring. That way you will know there is help and support on hand when you do need it.



The following tips can help you put a support network in place:

- Talk to people about how they can help you and what would be best for you. You can focus on what you can still do, and they can help with some of the things you find more difficult. This might be remembering to take your medication, managing the garden or shopping for food.
- If you don't have family or friends who can help you, you may want to speak to other people in your community. These could be neighbours, shopkeepers, people from a place of worship or your pharmacist or landlord. They may be able to help with things like lifts into town, shopping, gardening or simply calling in or phoning to see how you are.
- Consider telling people about your diagnosis, so they can offer you support if you need it. When people understand, they will be able to offer you help and make sure it is tailored to your needs.
- If you don't feel comfortable telling people about your diagnosis, you could just say that you need a bit of help with some things from time to time.
- Find out what support is available where you live. This could be from social services, a homecare agency or a local charity (such as Age UK). This support can include help with meals, cleaning and household jobs, gardening, transport and more. Contact your local social services or go to [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory) for more information.



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Staying in touch

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Getting out of the house and seeing other people, continuing to enjoy your hobbies, or just keeping in touch with friends and family are all important. You shouldn't feel cut off from other people just because you live alone.

Having dementia can make it harder to do things, and this can mean that you see people less than you used to. If you live in a rural area, it can be harder to get to the nearest shop or visit people. Or you might live in a city where there is better transport but less sense of community. However, there are still things you can do to stop yourself feeling isolated.



You may find that the people around you have different views on what you can and should do. They may think you need more help than you actually do. It's important to talk honestly to people about what they can do to help and what you can manage by yourself. Work together to come up with ways you can get the support you need. Try not to take it personally if they disagree with you – they're probably concerned or worried about you and trying to do what they can to help.

The following tips may help:

- Talk to other people regularly. You could arrange regular phone calls or visits with friends and family members.
- If you don't always want to be the person to make the first contact, you could tell people that this is how you feel and ask them to call or drop in every so often.
- If you have a computer, smart phone or tablet, consider using social media (for example WhatsApp) or a video calling app such as Skype to stay in touch with people. You may prefer a video call to a phone call because you can see the person you're talking to.
- Taking part in a local support or activity group such as Singing for the Brain® is a really good way of staying socially active. You might also meet new people who are in a similar situation. Find groups near you at [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory) or call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**.



Not everyone is comfortable using technology or the internet. If you would find it useful but are not sure where to start, computer training may be available in your area. Contact your local Age UK for more information (see '**Other useful organisations**' on page 28).



For more help and advice call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

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- See if there are any befriending opportunities in your area. A befriender is someone who comes and spends time with you regularly, either in your home or out in the community. This can allow you to continue your hobbies, take part in activities, or just have some companionship. You could also consider telephone befriending, where someone phones you regularly. The Silver Line offers a telephone befriending service – for details see ‘**Other useful organisations**’ on **page 28**.
- If you don’t have any family members or friends, or if you are no longer in touch, there are still ways of getting emotional support. Online communities or forums are a great way of meeting and talking with other people who have dementia. There will be lots of other people who are in a similar situation. Alzheimer’s Society’s **Talking Point** is a good place to start – go to **alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint**. There are also video conferencing support groups available on Facebook and Zoom that you might want to try.
- Try to get out regularly, for example going to the local shop to buy a paper each day. This can give you a chance to talk to someone and to feel more involved in the community.
- You can also keep in touch by subscribing to Alzheimer’s Society’s magazine, **Dementia together**, published every two months. For more information go to **alzheimers.org.uk/dementiatogether**



Loneliness and depression

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It's normal to feel lonely sometimes. However, if you don't have people around you, or find it hard to stay in touch, you may start to feel lonely more often. Loneliness can make you feel less like doing things, which can make you feel more isolated.

If you spend a lot of time on your own and don't have much contact with others, or don't have ways of occupying your time, you might become depressed. This is more than just feeling sad from time to time. Depression is when feelings of sadness and hopelessness take over your life. It is a serious condition that can have a big effect on your life, but there are things you can do to manage this and there is support available.

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'We go into a café in a local garden centre and I chat to staff because I have got to know them by going every week. They know my name and I feel welcome and comfortable.'

Person living with dementia

If you're feeling lonely or depressed, the following may help:

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- Try to do things even if you don't feel like it. Feeling lonely or depressed can make you less motivated and less likely to do things, which can make you more lonely and depressed. Try to do something you enjoy such as a hobby or seeing friends, even if it's just for a little while.
- Try doing something new – go to a new group or visit a museum, for example.
- Exercise can help if you're feeling depressed or lonely. It can be difficult when you're feeling low, but even going for a walk or doing some gardening can help.
- Talking about your feelings is often the first step in dealing with them. It can help to talk to other people such as friends or family. Try telling them how you're feeling. If people know that you aren't feeling good, they may keep in touch or visit more regularly.
- There are helplines that you can call for help and advice – Alzheimer's Society's support line is available on **0333 150 3456**.
- If you are finding everything too much, try talking to your GP. They may be able to help, or refer you to a specialist for 'talking therapy'. This is where you talk about how you're feeling to a professional such as a psychologist or counsellor.

Staying active

Continuing to do the things you enjoy and keeping your mind active is very important. It can help you to stay confident. It can also help you to keep your skills, abilities and independence for longer.

It can sometimes feel more difficult to do things when you live alone. You may find it harder to keep track of when things are happening, or to get from place to place. Dementia shouldn't stop you doing the things you want to, but you may have to change the way you do them.

The following tips can help you to stay active:

- Don't be afraid to try new things. Many local venues (such as the leisure centre, cinema, football club or library) offer activities for people living with dementia.
- There are lots of opportunities to get involved in the community. This could be at a local place of worship, village hall, theatre or museum.
- Transport can be difficult when you live alone, particularly if you live in a rural area. If you don't have someone who can give you a lift, think about local transport schemes such as community transport, accessible taxis or dial-a-ride. For more information contact your local Age UK or local council.



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- Some people find ‘helpcards’ useful when they are out and about. These are cards that explain you have dementia and that you might need more time or support. Alzheimer’s Society produces free helpcards you can order – go to [alzheimers.org.uk/publications](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/publications) or call **0300 303 5933**.
- You might find that technology can help you to stay independent and feel more confident when going out and about. There are lots of different types of technology available – for example, GPS devices in case you get lost. Your local council may have a telecare department to help you find technology that could work for you. Alternatively, social services or your GP can refer you to an occupational therapist who can help.
- Consider taking part in the Herbert Protocol. This is a national scheme where you or your family, friends or carers compile useful information about you, which can be used to help find you if you become lost. The Herbert Protocol is used by about 70% of police services across England and Wales. You can find more information at www.met.police.uk/herbertprotocol or contact your local police.



For more information see Alzheimer’s Society booklet **1506, Keeping active and involved**.



Dementia-friendly communities

Some communities are becoming 'dementia-friendly'. This means that:

- people in the area understand what dementia is and how it affects you
- banks, shops or post offices try to make it easier for people with dementia to use their services
- transport and signs are made easier and more accessible
- some places do special events for people with dementia such as dementia-friendly film screenings at the cinema, swimming sessions at the local pool or reminiscence workshops at the community centre or art gallery.

These things can make a big difference to people who live alone.

If you live in England, you may have a local Dementia Action Alliance. They support communities and organisations to take action to help people live well with dementia. You could even try to help them to make your community more dementia friendly. Ask your local Dementia Action Alliance or Age UK what is happening in your community. For details see **'Other useful organisations' on page 28.**



For more help and advice call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**



Managing at home

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We all have our own ways of doing things, but dementia makes everyday tasks more difficult, especially as it progresses. You may also have other conditions that make things harder, such as hearing loss or problems with your sight, or both.

When you live alone, you'll need to find ways to adapt how you do things. This will depend on your symptoms and the particular problems these cause.

You may have to develop ways of remembering regular things you have to do such as taking your medication or leaving out the bins. Or you may need to develop ways of managing everyday tasks around the home, such as cooking, cleaning or washing.

The following tips may help you to make everyday activities manageable:

- If you have memory problems, a diary, calendar or post-it notes can help you remember appointments, tasks and visits.
- Computers, tablets, digital assistants and smartphones also have apps you can use to set reminders. You can also save important numbers into a phone so they're easy to call.



- Try keeping to a regular routine and doing the most difficult things early in the day (or at the time of day you feel at your best).
- If you forget to take medication, dosette boxes (a box with separate compartments for days of the week and times of day) or automatic pill dispensers can help. Speak to your pharmacist or GP.
- If you find it difficult to visit the shops, you could ask your local council whether shopping buses are available in your area. These may take you directly from your home to the supermarket door. Alternatively, if you use the internet you may find online shopping useful.
- If you're finding it harder to cook, you could have meals delivered to you – this service is often known as 'meals on wheels'. Or you could choose ready meals that are easy to cook. If you still enjoy cooking but need help to continue, you could ask a family member or friend to help you. You may also be able to access assistance as part of a care plan from your council, or by paying a private care agency.
- Put a note by the door to remind you to lock up at night, or to remember your keys and wallet when you go out. You can get technology to help with this, such as a device that plays a recorded reminder when you open the front door.



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- Put labels and pictures on cupboards to remind you where things are. You could keep frequently used items – such as cups, plates, or cutlery – on the side.
- You can get ‘locator devices’ that help you find things you’ve misplaced. You attach a small tile to the object, and if you misplace it you can push a button that makes the tile beep.

If you think equipment or adaptations might help, talk to an occupational therapist.



For more information see Alzheimer’s Society factsheet **429, Using equipment and making adaptations at home.**

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‘A diary is a great idea. I use post it notes too, to remind me of what I need to do. That way there’s more chance of me actually doing them. I stick them on the wall at the foot of my bed so when I wake up I can see them. Doesn’t always work but it helps a bit.’

Person living with dementia



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Staying safe and independent at home

There are lots of ways you can set up your home to help you stay independent, physically active and safe.

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This is more important when you live alone. You may not have someone around who can help you if something goes wrong. If you have problems with your memory, you may forget to do things, such as turning the gas off. By making some of the small changes listed below you will be able to stay independent and living alone for longer.

You might not feel that you need to do all of these things now, but it can be a good idea to put things in place before you need them.

- Have carbon-monoxide and smoke detectors fitted. Contact your local fire service to arrange a free home fire safety check.
- Simple things like improving lighting and removing any clutter – especially items that are unused or could cause you to trip (for example loose rugs) – can make your home safer.
- Leave a light on in the bathroom at night. Night lights or lights connected to motion sensors that come on when you move about may help. You can buy these from the Alzheimer's Society online shop – alzheimers.org.uk/shop

- Leave a set of house keys with a neighbour you trust. Or you could install a key safe (a safe on the outside of your house that can only be accessed by entering the correct code).
- Keep a list of emergency telephone numbers by the phone. You could also save them on your phone to make it easier.
- Find out what schemes are available in your area so that your wishes are known in an emergency. Examples are MedicAlert®, Message in a Bottle and ReSPECT – see **‘Other useful organisations’ on page 28** for details.
- Think about technology that could help you. For example, there are ‘shut-off’ devices that turn off the gas or electricity after a set amount of time. You can also get alarms that you wear as pendants or bracelets that you can set off if you become worried or have a fall. These will call an operator who will be able to help you.
- Telecare, a remotely operated care system, links sensors around your home to a call centre by a telephone line. The sensors monitor movement in your home and alert the centre if things go wrong. For example, sensors can detect if you fall.

An occupational therapist can assist if you think equipment or adaptations might help.



For more information see factsheet **473, Using technology to help with everyday life** and booklets **1502, Keeping safe at home** and **819, Making your home dementia friendly**.



For more help and advice call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**



Money and financial issues

Managing money can become more difficult when you have dementia. If you live alone, there may be some extra things for you to think about. It may be harder for you to get to the bank or the post office, for example. You might also need to think of ways to remember to pay bills.

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Try the following suggestions to make it easier to manage your money:

- You could work out how much money you need each week and put a routine in place to withdraw it on the same day. You could put different amounts in individual envelopes for different things – for example, money for shopping in one, money for the newspaper in another.



‘If I am in the bank I will explain that I have early onset Alzheimer’s. People are more helpful if you tell them what you’ve got.’

Person living with dementia.

- Set up direct debits for your regular bills such as gas, electricity and council tax. This means you won't need to remember to pay a bill each time.
- Talk to your bank about options they offer that can help you. For example, cash is increasingly being replaced by alternative payment options such as contactless and this might work for you. Some banks now have their own guides and specific advisers trained to support people with dementia with their banking. Speaking to your bank can make finances much easier to manage in the long term.
- Think about online or phone banking if you find it hard to get to your local branch.

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For more information see booklet
1501, Managing your money.



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Avoiding scams

You might be more vulnerable to scams and tricks if you live alone, so it's important to know the dangers and make sure you keep yourself protected. The following tips may help:

- Be aware of cold callers. Never give your bank details to anyone.
- Stop unwanted junk mail and telephone calls by registering with the Mail Preference Service and Telephone Preference Service (see '**Other useful organisations**' on page 28). You can also buy call blockers to stop getting telephone calls from unfamiliar numbers.
- If you are getting unwanted marketing text messages or emails, opt out or unsubscribe to stop receiving future messages.
- You could put a 'no cold callers' sign on your front door. You may be able to get one from your local council.
- If you are unsure about someone (such as a worker or salesperson) ask for their identification. If you still feel unsure ask them to come back when you have someone with you. You can also ring the company to check who they are and if they are meant to be in your area that day.



For more information see booklet **1502, Keeping safe at home.**



For more help and advice call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**



Planning for the future

When you have a diagnosis of dementia, it's important to plan for the future. This could be about the type of care you want, or where you want to live if you can no longer live alone. This can be more important when you live alone because you may not have someone who knows what you want and what your preferences are.

When you feel ready, start thinking about what your wishes are and recording them – including who you can share this information with. The following are key things you can put in place to make sure your wishes are carried out in the future:

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- **Lasting power of attorney (LPA) and Enduring power of attorney (EPA)** – these give someone you choose the power to make decisions on your behalf, if you can no longer make them yourself. You can have an LPA for health and welfare (which covers decisions about care and treatment, including where you live), or for property and affairs (which covers decisions about finances and selling a house on your behalf) or both. In Northern Ireland, the EPA system only covers property and financial affairs.
- **Appointeeship** – this gives someone the ability to manage any income from benefits for you, if you're unable to manage your benefits. If someone is prepared to act on your behalf, they should contact the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and request an appointeeship assessment.



If you've already arranged a Lasting or Enduring power of attorney, they can manage your income from benefits, so you won't need an appointee as well.

- **Advance decision (or advance directive in Northern Ireland)** – this records your decisions about future medical care. It is a legal document that allows you to refuse, in advance, specific medical treatments or procedures – for example, whether to be resuscitated if your heart stops. It can't be used to refuse basic care.
- **Advance statement** – this records your likes and dislikes, and your priorities and preferences for the future. For example, where you would like to be cared for or day-to-day things you like to do, such as having a bath instead of a shower. It isn't legally binding, but can help people to know what you want if you cannot decide these things for yourself.

 For more information on planning for the future see booklet **1510, Planning ahead.**

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'I think it's entirely sensible to forward plan... I would start with making a will and granting an LPA.'

Person living with dementia



When you can no longer live alone

Dementia is progressive and as time passes your symptoms will get worse. You will need more support and may no longer be able to manage at home on your own. It can be hard to know when this point has come.

You may struggle more than you used to with day-to-day tasks like cooking or washing. You may not feel safe in your own home anymore. Or you may find it harder to get out and about, and this may mean you feel increasingly isolated and lonely.

It might be hard to accept that you can no longer live alone. You may have lived alone for a long time, and you may be worried about losing your independence. It's important that you're honest with yourself. If you are struggling living on your own, or in your own home, you may want to move to somewhere you can get the support you need.

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It can be a good idea to think about housing options before you need to move. This means that you will know what is available when the time comes. It might also feel less like a leap into the unknown if you have already thought about your options and found somewhere you would feel comfortable moving to.

You won't necessarily have to move into a nursing or care home if you can no longer live alone. There are a range of housing options that you could consider. Some of these will give you more independence than others, depending on the amount of support you need.

- **Sheltered housing** – these are self-contained flats. They may have a warden and a 24-hour emergency alarm system. Some may have communal facilities. The level of support will vary depending on the scheme. Sheltered housing schemes usually expect residents to have a certain level of independence.
- **Extra care housing** – this is similar to sheltered housing but it provides extra support, such as assistance with personal care, meals, domestic support, and community activities.
- **Shared lives** – this is a scheme where someone who needs care and support moves in with, or is supported by, an approved Shared Lives carer.
- **Care homes** – these are either residential care homes (providing support and assistance with personal care) or nursing homes (providing nursing care as well). The type of home that will be most suitable will depend on your needs.

It can help to talk to someone you trust about options and what you would like to happen in the future. For more information on housing options contact the Elderly Accommodation Counsel (see **'Other useful organisations'** on page 28).





Other useful organisations

Age UK

0800 678 1602 (advice line, 8am–7pm)

www.ageuk.org.uk

Age Cymru

0300 303 44 98 (advice line, 9am–4pm Monday–Friday)

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru

Age NI

0808 808 7575 (advice line, 9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland

Age UK aims to improve later life for everyone through information and advice, services, campaigns, products, training and research. Services include help at home, benefits advice, handy person services and gardening services

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Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Citizens advice offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help people resolve problems with debt, benefits, employment, housing and discrimination.



Dementia Action Alliance

www.dementiaaction.org.uk

DAA is an alliance of organisations across England that works to improve health and social care outcomes for people with dementia, including work on dementia-friendly communities.

Disabled Living Foundation

0300 999 0004 (helpline, 10am–4pm Monday–Friday)

info@dlf.org.uk

livingmadeeasy.org.uk

The Disabled Living Foundation is a national organisation providing practical advice and information on equipment and technology, than can help people with dementia to live more independently.

Elderly Accommodation Counsel

0800 377 7070

enquiries@eac.org.uk

www.housingcare.org

The Elderly Accommodation Counsel is a charity that aims to help older people make informed choices about their housing and care needs.

Mailing Preference Service

www.mpsonline.org.uk

The Mailing Preference Service provides a free online register to stop receiving unsolicited direct mail.



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

MedicAlert

01908 951045

info@medicalert.org.uk

www.medicalert.org.uk

MedicAlert is a scheme that sells jewellery engraved with a code that links to a person's medical records. It allows health professionals to get a person's history in an emergency.

Message in a Bottle

lionsclubs.co/public

Message in a Bottle is a free scheme run by Lions Club International. They provide free bottles that you keep in your fridge with your medical information inside, in case of an emergency. For more contact your local Lions Club through the website.

ReSPECT (Recommended Summary Plan for Emergency Care and Treatment)

020 7388 4678

www.resus.org.uk/respect

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ReSPECT is a process run by the Resuscitation Council that creates personalised recommendations for a person's clinical care in a future emergency.

The Silver Line

0800 4 70 80 90 (helpline, 24 hour)

info@thesilverline.org.uk

www.thesilverline.org.uk

The Silver Line provides a 24-hour helpline for older people across the UK. Also provides telephone and letter friendship schemes.

Shared Lives Plus

0151 227 3499

info@sharedlivesplus.org.uk

www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk

Shared Lives Plus is a UK network of carers and support workers involved in lots of small projects to help adults across the country.

Telephone Preference Service

www.tpsonline.org.uk

The Telephone Preference Service is a free service where you can record your preference not to receive unsolicited sales or marketing telephone calls.

UK Homecare Association

020 8661 8188

enquiries@homecareassociation.org.uk

www.ukhca.co.uk

The UK Homecare Association is a professional association of homecare providers from the independent, voluntary, not-for-profit and statutory sectors. They can give you details of homecare agencies in your area, that offer a range of services from help with managing everyday jobs to personal care.

Your local council

www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council

Your local council provides information, advice and services. These will vary depending on where you live. For more information contact your local council directly. You can find contact details in the phone book or at the GOV.UK website above.



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Our information is based on evidence and need, and is regularly updated using quality-controlled processes. It is reviewed by experts in health and social care and people affected by dementia.

Reviewed by: Emma Ouldred, Lead Dementia and Delirium Nurse, King's College Hospital and Caroline Cottrell, Memory Service Practitioner, Haringey Memory Service.

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To give feedback on this publication, or for a list of sources, contact [**publications@alzheimers.org.uk**](mailto:publications@alzheimers.org.uk)

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We are Alzheimer's Society. We are a vital source of support and a powerful force for change for everyone affected by dementia. We provide help and hope.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk or call our **Dementia Connect support line** on **0333 150 3456**. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)



People affected by dementia need our support more than ever. With your help we can continue to provide the vital services, information and advice they need. To make a single or monthly donation, please call us on **0330 333 0804** or go to alzheimers.org.uk/donate



Alzheimer's Society
43-44 Crutched Friars
London EC3N 2AE

0330 333 0804
info@alzheimers.org.uk
alzheimers.org.uk

Code 1508

