

Worksheet 4:

Conditions that can be confused with dementia

Delirium

Delirium is sudden severe confusion and rapid changes in brain function that occur with physical or mental illness. It is usually temporary and reversible. Many disorders cause delirium, including conditions that deprive the brain of oxygen or other substances.

Causes:

- Alcohol or sedative drug withdrawal
- Drug abuse
- Body chemical disturbances
- Infections such as urinary tract infections or pneumonia (more likely in people who already have brain damage from stroke or dementia)
- Poisons
- Surgery

Depression

In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. It doesn't stop you leading your normal life, but it can make everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, major depression (clinical depression) can be life-threatening, because it can make people suicidal or simply give up the will to live.

People don't always realise what's going on because their problems seem to be physical, not mental.

These are some of the symptoms of depression:

- Being restless and agitated
- Waking up early, having difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more
- Feeling tired and lacking energy; doing less and less
- Experiencing difficulty remembering things
- Getting no pleasure out of life or things you usually enjoy
- Finding it hard to concentrate or make decisions
- Lacking self-confidence and self-esteem
- Feeling helpless
- Distancing yourself from others; not asking for support
- Experiencing a sense of unreality

Mild Cognitive Impairment

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) describes a set of symptoms rather than a specific medical condition or disease.

A person with MCI has subtle problems with one or more of the following:

- Day-to-day memory
- Planning
- Language
- Attention
- Visuo-spatial skills ('visuo' referring to eyesight and 'spatial' referring to space or location), which give a person the ability to interpret objects and shapes

In MCI, these symptoms will have been noticed by the individual and those who know them. If the person with MCI has taken cognitive function tests, their problems will be seen in test results over time. Any decline will be greater than the gradual decline that many people experience as part of normal, healthy ageing. There may be minor problems with more demanding tasks, but generally not problems in everyday living. (If there is a significant impact on everyday abilities, this may suggest dementia.)

Memory loss and other cognitive problems can arise from many different causes. People will have MCI as a result of a curable condition such as stress, anxiety or depression, or from physical illness or side-effects of medication.

Other conditions or circumstances which may be confused with dementia