

# Dementia

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Dementia is the loss of the ability to think, remember and work things out. It usually affects older people. But, HIV can damage the brain leading to the development of dementia.

In countries like the UK, where HIV treatment is available, dementia in people with HIV is extremely rare. The cases of dementia that are now seen often involve people who have their HIV diagnosed very late, when they are extremely unwell because of HIV.

Milder forms of cognitive impairment have been seen in people with HIV. But there is still a lot of uncertainty and debate about the causes and significance of these problems, which are sometimes so mild they have no impact on daily life.

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## Symptoms

The symptoms of HIV-related dementia can be divided into three types. People can develop any or all of these symptoms.

- Difficulty in thinking or understanding, such as forgetfulness, loss of memory, loss of concentration and confusion.
- Changes in behaviour, including loss of interest, feelings of isolation and childishness.
- Problems with movement and co-ordination such as loss of balance or strength in the limbs.

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## Treatment

Dementia now only develops in very rare circumstances. HIV treatment will mean that your immune system is strong enough to stop you developing dementia.

Some anti-HIV drugs are very good at getting into the brain and are therefore very good at preventing or treating dementia. These include abacavir (*Ziagen*), AZT (zidovudine, *Retrovir*) and efavirenz (*Sustiva*).