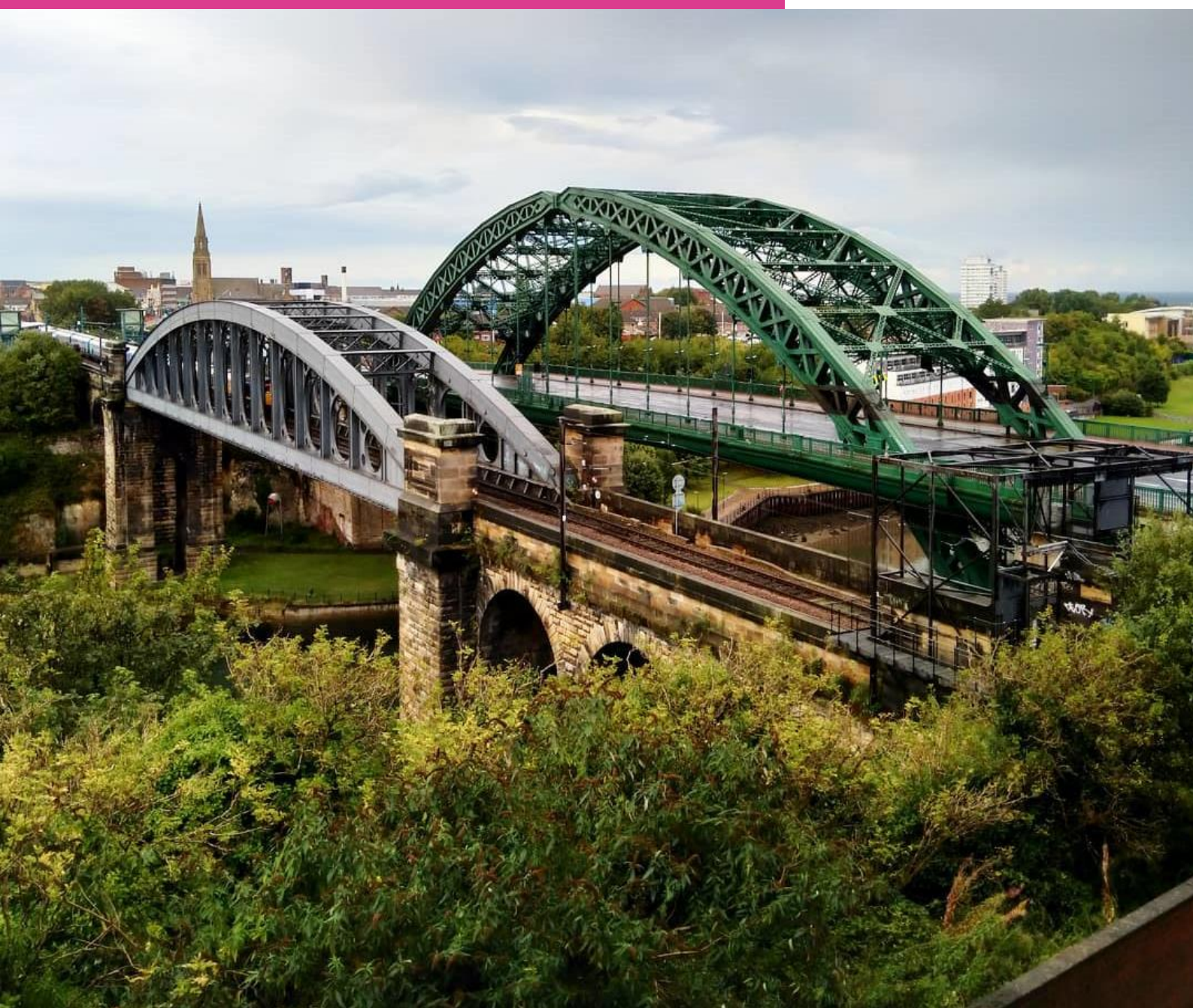


# Physical health

**healthwatch**  
Sunderland

**Support available for people  
experiencing memory difficulties or  
dementia in Sunderland**

**Issue 1 – Published April 2025**



The information in this booklet has been taken from 'Support available for people experiencing memory difficulties or dementia in Sunderland' which has information on a range of subjects which you may also find useful.

Find the full document at: [www.healthwatchsunderland.com](http://www.healthwatchsunderland.com)

Scan for the  
latest edition  
of this booklet



# Contents

About Healthwatch Sunderland and why we did this work	3
What to expect from your GP practice	4
Eye health checks	5
The importance of hearing tests	5
How to get an NHS hearing test	5
Incontinence	5
Dental care	5
Taking your medications	6
Podiatry (foot care)	6
The Falls service	6
Sunderland stop smoking service	6
District nursing service	7
The Frailty service	7
Recovery at home	8
Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)	8
The carers passport	8
The Alexandra Centre	8
Delirium	9
Visiting the emergency department (A&E) at Sunderland Royal Hospital	10
Age UK Sunderland's Hospital Discharge Service	10
Sundowning	11

The information in this booklet is a section that has been taken from the full booklet titled, 'Support available for people experiencing memory difficulties or dementia in Sunderland'. The full booklet has information on a range of subjects which you may also find useful.

Healthwatch Sunderland regularly updates these booklets. The copy you have may not be the latest version. For the most current copies of all the associated booklets, please visit: [www.healthwatchsunderland.com](http://www.healthwatchsunderland.com) or call us on 0191 514 7145.

If you have information to add or notice anything outdated in the booklets, please contact us and these will be considered.



# About Healthwatch Sunderland

## Healthwatch Sunderland is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and social care decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

**It is our vision** to live in a world where we can all get the health and care we need.

**It is our mission** to make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.

**Our values are to:**

- **Listen** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Include** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analyse** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Act** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partner** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

## Why we did this work

During our engagement with the Essence Service, which supports people in the early stages of dementia and their carers, we heard from local carers about some of their experiences. They expressed concerns about the lack of information available on local support services following their family members' diagnoses. Many felt unsure about where to go for help and were not aware of the available resources. This feedback was also recognised by the Essence Service during their feedback sessions held in Dementia Action Week 2023.

In response to this need, we collaborated with the Essence Service, carers and other local partners to create a booklet named 'Support available for people experiencing memory difficulties or dementia in Sunderland'. This document offers key support information on a range of subjects. This may be useful for people experiencing memory difficulties and those living with dementia. The information in this booklet, 'Physical health', has been taken from the full booklet.

Please be aware that some of the services mentioned, are only available to people with a dementia diagnosis.

# Physical health



Looking after your physical health can be difficult, but it can have a significant impact on your general wellbeing.

Many people, including those living with dementia are also living with long-term health problems, such as circulatory or respiratory issues and sight or hearing loss. It is equally important that these conditions are well managed too.

In many cases, approaches to a healthy lifestyle can benefit both brain and physical health. The following are some top priorities:

- Recognise and manage hearing loss.
- Recognise and treat depression.
- Stay active.
- Stop smoking.
- Maintain blood pressure within a healthy range (your GP practice can check this for you).
- Detect and treat high blood pressure and cholesterol (your GP practice can check this for you).
- Maintain a healthy weight and BMI.
- Reduce alcohol consumption.
- Maintain social relationships and avoid becoming isolated.
- Have regular sight checks and treatment as necessary.

## What to expect from your GP practice

If a person receives a dementia diagnosis, an annual review should be carried out at their GP practice. Not all GP practices will contact the person to make an appointment for this. Make sure you contact them to make an appointment.

Although there may be very little medical intervention needed, every GP practice in Sunderland have social prescribers working with them. They can help with a range of things. (Please see the booklet on Local Support Services for information on Sunderland GP Alliance Social Prescribers).

Always keep your GP surgery's telephone number by your telephone, just in case!

### NHS 111

If you're worried about a symptom and not sure what help you need, NHS 111 can tell you what to do next.  
Visit: [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk) or call 111

### In an emergency

For a life-threatening emergency call 999



## Sunderland Health **NHS** & Wellness Hub

**Not sure where to go for health and wellness advice?**

**Trusted NHS health information is just a click away...**

Visit the new Sunderland Health and Wellness Hub online and find lots of information about local healthcare services.

**Find us online at**  
**[www.shwh.co.uk](http://www.shwh.co.uk)**



SCAN ME





## Eye health checks

Although dementia does not directly affect the eyes themselves, it can impact how the brain processes visual information.

Getting eyes checked regularly and correcting any additional vision problems can help maintain a high quality of life. This is especially important for those with dementia.

Eyes checks should take place every two years or as often as the optician recommends. If you notice any changes in your vision, you should get them checked as soon as possible. Some opticians offer home visits.

## The importance of hearing tests

Evidence suggests that managing hearing loss could reduce or delay the impact of dementia. It is important we check our hearing regularly.

Once hearing loss is diagnosed, it can be managed with hearing aids. Hearing aids can significantly increase people's ability to take part in everyday life and communicate with friends and family. This helps improve people's wellbeing. This potentially reduces the risk of depression and social isolation and slows cognitive decline.

## How to get an NHS hearing test

You can get a free NHS hearing test. A GP may refer you to a hearing specialist (audiologist) who can do the test. It could take a few weeks to see a specialist so it might be quicker to get tested somewhere else. This could be at a large pharmacy or opticians. This is often free.

## Incontinence

Many people who are living with dementia experience incontinence of the bladder and/or bowel which can be daunting.

In Sunderland we have an NHS Bladder and Bowel Service. A nurse led team offer support with all aspects of continence promotion, assessment and treatment. They can also support with the management of continence related issues of both the bladder and the bowel. After assessment they can offer various incontinence products to best suit the person's needs.

**Contact your GP practice for a referral into the service.**

## Dental care

A person with dementia may not be able to maintain a daily tooth and mouth cleaning routine without careful supervision. Toothache may be suffered but the person may not be able to tell anyone that they are in pain. The carer must be alert for signs. This could include; holding their face, grimacing and appearing sensitive to hot or cold food and drink.

Dentures can, eventually become uncomfortable and the person should not be pressured into wearing them. In these circumstances, food choices may then be limited. Softer foods can be considered, which need less chewing.

It is important to have regular check-ups with an NHS or private dentist.

# Physical health



## Taking your medications

It is important that medications are taken as prescribed. People may need support to do this.

Some medications need to be taken at set intervals or a specific time of day. With or after food, or on an empty stomach.

Things people can do to help them remember are:

- Visual reminders like a wall chart or a label stuck to the cabinet where it is kept.
- A pill organiser with separate compartments for times of day and days of the week.
- Alarms or alerts on the person's phone .
- Voice reminders, e.g. using a smart speaker.
- Smartphone apps.
- Linking taking the medication with part of their daily routine, e.g. teeth brushing. This will help to make it easier to remember.

In some cases, pharmacies can supply tablets in a dosette box. This is a pre-filled pill organiser that clearly shows the times and days when each medication needs to be taken.

**Ask your regular pharmacy for details.**

## Podiatry (foot care)

Podiatrists specialise in helping people improve their mobility, independence and quality of life. They do this by assessing, diagnosing and treating foot and lower leg problems.

Sunderland's local podiatry department provides a range of footcare services in a number of local health centres and primary care centres in Sunderland and a Sunderland Royal Hospital.

Home visits are offered to patients who are totally housebound.

**Contact your GP practice for a referral into the service.**

### The Falls service

This service is based at The Galleries Health Centre, Washington, and sees patients who have recently had a fall, are at risk of falling, or struggle with their mobility. They carry out an assessment for falls or the risk of falls, including for those with dizziness or balance problems.

**Your GP can refer you to this service.**



If you live or work in Sunderland, our stop smoking service can offer you an individual quit programme for up to 12 weeks.

You will be offered weekly tailored advice and support from a Specialist Practitioner to help plan and manage your quit attempt.

**Are you ready to stop smoking?**

**Phone:** 0191 567 1057

**Email:** [sunderland.stopsmokingservice@nhs.net](mailto:sunderland.stopsmokingservice@nhs.net)

**Website:** [sunderlandstopsmokingservice.co.uk](http://sunderlandstopsmokingservice.co.uk)

# Physical health



## District nursing service

The district nursing service is a team of nurses consisting of district nursing specialist practitioners, community staff nurses, and health care assistants. They provide nursing care for housebound patients. The district nurses are supported by the specialist frailty nurses, social workers and the diagnostic team. The district nurses have a close working relationship with GPs, specialist palliative care services, tissue viability, continence service, equipment services, social services and other multidisciplinary and voluntary services.

The district nursing team provides nursing care to the housebound in:

- Palliative care – delivering highly skilled care at end of life and palliative support, allowing people to remain at home and die in their preferred place of care.
- Controlled drug administration and symptom management.
- Assessment and management of wounds.
- Bladder and bowel care, catheterisation and continence assessment.
- Diabetic management and support around insulin administration.
- Holistic assessment, care planning, monitoring and review of all patients entering and currently on the caseload.

Referrals into the service can be made by GPs, hospitals, patients, family members, carers, care homes and social workers. A person will be assessed to make sure the service is suitable for them.

Where the patient lives will determine the best district nursing team to contact:

- Coalfields District Nursing Team call: 0191 502 5763
- East District Nursing Team call: 0191 5027424
- North District Nursing Team call: 0191 5027350
- Washington District Nursing Team call: 0191 5026999
- West District Nursing Teams call: 0191 5026426
- Sunderland Central District Nursing Team call: 0191 5025837

## The Frailty service

**What is frailty?** The term frailty refers to a person's mental and physical resilience, or their ability to bounce back and recover from events like illness and injury.

The frailty service is nursing teams working together to co-ordinate care and services for people who have been identified as needing support.

They aim to provide personalised care, support, and future care planning to promote independence, wellness, and self-care if possible. This may also help to reduce hospital admissions and to help the person stay healthier for longer.

Patients may live in their own home, sheltered accommodation, supported living or in an older persons care home.

Referrals into the service can be made by GP's, hospital services and community teams.



# Physical health



## Recovery at home

Recovery at home provide a 24 hours a day 7 days a week service. They are ready to respond quickly to provide support during times of illness. Or if someone experiences an unexpected change in their condition that could develop into a crisis. The teams respond to patients in their own homes.

You can call them 24 hours per day, 7 days per week on 0191 561 6666

## Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)

Speech and Language Therapy is important for people living with dementia. It helps address difficulties with speech, language, communication, eating, drinking, and swallowing. They work on memory, problem solving, and higher-level thinking skills to maintain independence.

Contact your GP practice for a referral into the service.

## The carers passport

This is in place across South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust hospitals to help carers support their loved ones while they are an inpatient on the wards.

It is a credit card-sized passport, worn on a lanyard. This helps staff to identify carers and enables those carers to:

- Visit outside normal hours, including overnight, with the agreement of the ward manager.
- Help the patient with eating and drinking.
- Be actively involved in the patient's care and planning for discharge.



If you are supporting a loved one who is an inpatient in hospital. This can be in Sunderland or South Tyneside, ask a member of staff on the ward if you can be considered for a carers passport.

## The Alexandra Centre

This centre is based in Sunderland Royal Hospital and is dedicated to offering care for patients with dementia and delirium while they are an inpatient in the hospital.

Patients can access therapeutic and wellbeing activities in a warm and caring, non-clinical environment.





# Physical health



## Delirium

Delirium is a disturbance of brain function where the person suffers from sudden confusion and changes in their behaviour and alertness. It is most common in people over 65 and in those with pre-existing memory difficulties such as dementia.

### What are the symptoms of delirium?

The symptoms of delirium are often worse at night. This can affect how the person sleeps. People with delirium often sleep through the day and are awake at night. Symptoms can be made worse by constipation, pain, impaired hearing or eyesight, poor nutrition and an unfamiliar environment.

A person suffering from delirium can suffer from symptoms including;

- Confusion
- Easily distracted
- Ramble some speech
- Changes in alertness
- Agitation (sometimes leading to aggression)
- Behavioural changes
- Changes in personality including paranoia
- Hallucinations.

**It is important to seek medical advice if any of these symptoms are present.**

Recovery can be anytime between a few hours and several weeks. Delirium can cause people to feel frightened, suspicious, restless and uncooperative, even with people they know well.

### What are the causes of delirium?

There are many causes of delirium, including:

- Infection – such as chest or urine infection.
- Certain medications, such as some sedatives.
- Surgery.
- Dehydration or abnormalities in the salts in the blood.
- Alcohol or drug withdrawal.
- Constipation.
- Stroke.
- Pain.
- Malnutrition.
- Change in the person's surroundings.

Often, delirium has more than one cause. In addition, certain patients are more prone to a delirium and require a less severe cause such as constipation to become confused.

### Coping as a carer

Having a relative or friend who is suffering from delirium can be a frightening experience. The person may seem distressed and frightened and sometimes they do not recognise their closest friends or relatives.

The symptoms are normally short lived but can last several weeks or sometimes months. The duration of the delirium will change depending on the severity of the underlying cause.

# Physical health



## Visiting the emergency department (A&E) at Sunderland Royal Hospital

Thanks to the work of carers of people with dementia, from Age UK Sunderland's Dementia Hub, Essence Service and South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, Sunderland Royal Hospital now has a dedicated, single occupancy waiting room for people who are living with dementia and their carers.

The room has been named 'Poppy's Place'. The room has activities and a dedicated accessible toilet nearby. Incontinence products are also available from the departments nurse's station if they are required.

If you attend the emergency department, ask at reception if you can use this quiet space.

## Age UK Sunderland's Hospital Discharge Service

This service aims to promote a good quality of life through supporting reablement, giving choice and control of independence for all older people in Sunderland.



This free service can provide up to 3 weeks support following discharge from hospital at a time convenient to you. People need different levels of support and Age UK Sunderland's team can make visits 5 days a week, between the hours of 9.00am to 5.00pm.

## How does a person qualify for the hospital discharge service?

- If the person is over 60 years old.
- Live in Sunderland.
- Are without a care plan.

## What can they assist with?

- Shopping
- Light housework
- Meal preparation
- Collect prescriptions
- Companionship
- Signposting.

Contact Age UK Sunderland for more information about this service:

Call: 0191 514 1131

Email: [enquiries@ageuksunderland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ageuksunderland.org.uk)

Website: [www.ageuk.org.uk/sunderland](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/sunderland)

# Physical health



## Sundowning

The Alzheimer's Society say, sometimes a person with dementia will behave in ways that are difficult to understand in the late afternoon or early evening. This is known as 'sundowning'.

Sometimes you might see changes in the person's behaviour in the late afternoon or towards the end of the day. During this time, the person may become intensely distressed, agitated and have hallucinations or delusions. This may continue into the night. This makes it hard for them to get enough sleep.

Sundowning can happen at any stage of dementia but is more common during the middle and later stages.

The reasons why sundowning happens are not well understood. It is possible that a range of different causes makes it more likely. These might include:

- Tiredness, hunger, pain or other unmet physical needs.
- Not enough exposure to sunlight during the day.
- Overstimulation during the day. Such as from a noisy or busy environment.
- Disturbance to the person's 'body clock' caused by damage to the brain.
- Disturbed levels of hormones that vary over the course of the day.
- Sensory impairment, such as hearing or sight loss.
- Tiredness in other people causing the person with dementia to become upset.
- Mood disorders, such as anxiety or depression.
- Fewer carers around to look after the person (in a care home).
- Side effects of prescribed drugs.

Some of these are related to the time of day. Others may happen at any time. Try to identify which of these problems might be affecting the person, as each problem may need a different treatment.

## Tips for reducing sundowning

Sometimes what seems like 'sundowning' could be the person trying to communicate a need. This could be needing the toilet, feeling hungry or being in pain.

Uneven indoor lighting and reflective surfaces can sometimes cause confusion by creating disturbing shadows or mirrors. Close the curtains or blinds once it starts to get dark and cover the television with a dust cover, if it's not being used.

Think whether something that's happened during the day has affected them. If they seem agitated, try to calm them by distracting them. Perhaps talking about a favourite memory or event they enjoy thinking about.

If they remain agitated, it could be that they have a need that is not being met. Contact the Alzheimer's Society to find out more:

Call: 0333 150 3456

Website: [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)



# Thank you to our partners

This work would not have been possible without the support from our partners and local carers with lived experience of living and supporting a loved one with a dementia diagnosis. Thank you on behalf of all at Healthwatch Sunderland for your time, your passion and your commitment to producing this booklet. It is hoped it will support and improve the lives of people experiencing memory difficulties, dementia and their carers across the City of Sunderland.

Thank you to:

## Local carers





**Website: [healthwatchsunderland.com](http://healthwatchsunderland.com)**

**Call: 0191 5147145**

**Email: [healthwatchsunderland@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchsunderland@pcp.uk.net)**

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