

Health services must address multiple conditions in dementia care

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Most people living with dementia also have at least one other health condition, and health services need to adapt to optimise their health and quality of life, a new study concludes.

In a study led by the University of Exeter, most [people](#) with [dementia](#) had one or more additional chronic [health](#) condition—or comorbidity—with hypertension ([high blood pressure](#)) being the most common. Diabetes, depression, tissue diseases such as arthritis, cardiovascular disease and heart problems were also common.

People with a more health conditions rated their quality of life less positively than people with fewer health conditions. This was particularly so for people with five or more health conditions.

The findings, published in *Age and Ageing*, arise from research on the Improving the experience of Dementia and Enhancing Active Life (IDEAL) cohort. Funded by the National Institute for Health Research and the Economic and Social Research Council, it consisted of 1,547 people diagnosed with dementia who provided information on the number and type of health conditions. Participants also provided ratings of their quality of life, both in relation to dementia and to overall health.

Professor Linda Clare, from the University of Exeter, is Principal Investigator on the IDEAL cohort studies. She said: "People with dementia living with additional health conditions are at greater risk of experiencing pain, mobility problems, anxiety and depression, and report poor quality of life. While multiple health condition are also common in older people without dementia, a diagnosis of dementia can mean that other health conditions don't always get the attention they deserve.

"With 800,000 people in the UK currently living with dementia, this study highlights the need for better care planning and support to deal with multiple conditions in a more integrated way. This will optimise quality of life for both people with dementia and their carers, and help people live independently for longer."

The researchers found that 74 per cent of people with dementia in the

study had one or more additional health conditions, while 22 per cent had at least three additional [conditions](#).

Alzheimer's Society supports IDEAL through £2 million in funding for a Centre of Excellence in Dementia Care at Exeter. and the Society will continue to support the project until at least 2022. Dr. James Pickett, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Society said: "This adds solid research evidence to what people with dementia tell us about how other [health conditions](#) complicate their care, and the negative impact to their lives that can result from [health services](#) not taking a holistic approach.

"Dementia research isn't all about a cure; Alzheimer's Society is also investing in IDEAL and other vital care studies through our Centres of Excellence because we owe it to the 850,000 people in the UK currently living with dementia so that they can live better."

The full paper, entitled 'The impact of comorbidity on the quality of life of people with dementia: findings from the IDEAL study', is published in *Age and Aging*.

Provided by University of Exeter

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