

**SUNSHINER'S DEMENTIA STORY**  
**Ages 13+**

**Claire and the Birthday Cake**



**Kent and Medway**  
NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust



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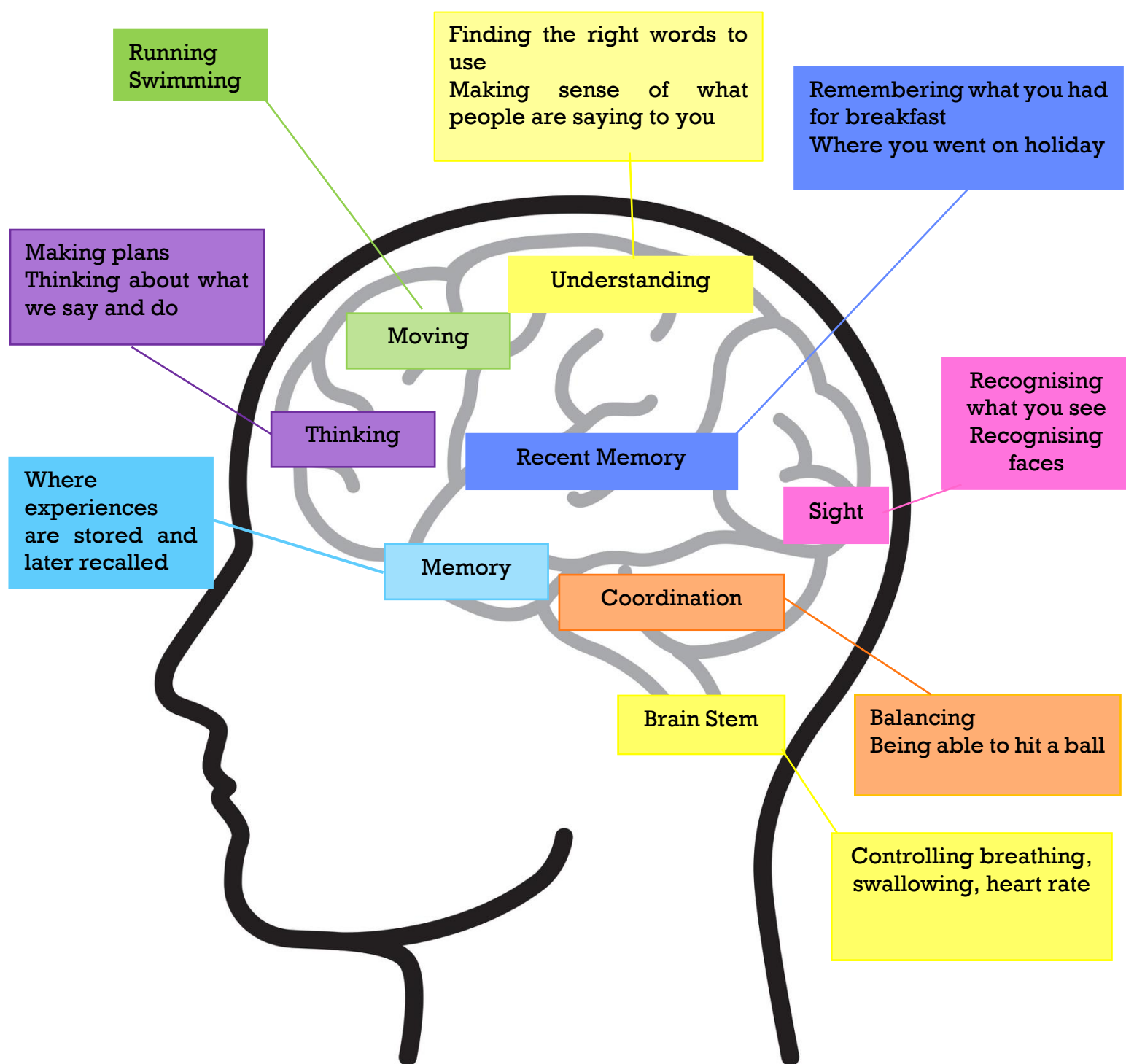


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# Why do people get dementia?

The brain is a very complicated organ and is responsible for many things that we do. Dementia effects the way the brain works. This can change the way the person thinks, moves, what they can understand, their memories and coordination. See below some of the things the brain does, and what can be affected when a person has dementia:



# What is Dementia?

Dementia is an umbrella term. It describes a range of conditions which affect a person's brain cells. This can lead to things like confusion, memory loss and issues with speech and understanding. The most common types of dementia are Alzheimer's disease, Vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, Frontotemporal dementia, mixed dementia, and young onset dementia. Dementia is a progressive condition so will get worse overtime. However, there are somethings you can do to help:

You could try asking questions about photographs, films, music, or memories from the past.



Behaviours like hugging, holding hands or sitting together can make people feel special and loved.



Or some people enjoy planning an activity to do together.

## Claire's Story

Claire's our next-door neighbour, which is handy, because she's also our hairdresser. She gave me my very first hair cut when I was a baby, sitting in our kitchen. I don't remember it, of course, but I've seen the photo. She does my nails too, nowadays, and she still cuts Mum's and my hair in the kitchen. Mum says she's like one of the family.

Lately, though, Claire's been having a tough time. A few weeks ago, she got diagnosed with dementia and she's finding it's a lot to get her head around.

When she said she wanted to make a cake for Mum's birthday party, tonight, we all said yes: Claire's a great baker, and Mum was glad to see Claire smiling again.

So, when we heard Claire's smoke alarm going off, we were a bit worried and went straight round to see what had happened.

The cake was burned to a crisp, and Claire was in tears. Then she said she didn't want to come to the party.

'Why not?' said Mum.

'Because of my dementia,' Claire said. 'What if people think I'm losing my mind? What if I forget my words or get in a muddle? What if my brain feels full of fog?'

'None of that matters,' Mum said. 'You'll still be the life and soul of the party.'

'It matters to me,' Claire said. 'I'll forget people's names. I'll say the wrong thing and embarrass myself. I'm not like I used to be.'



I couldn't bear to see Claire so down on herself.

'Claire, I'll stick with you. I'll tell you the names. I never know what to say either, but I never feel worried about talking to you.'

She smiled at me then, and I gave her a hug.

'You're still you, Claire,' Mum said. 'We'll find new ways to make it work, together.'

I had an idea. 'Could you maybe do my nails, Claire?' I said.

As she put the varnish on me, Claire seemed to calm down back to her old self.

Claire did come to the party. She didn't stay too late as she started to get really tired, but we had a great time dancing and laughing together.

The next day, Claire told me she couldn't remember what people had said to her at the party, but she could remember how they'd made her feel. She said I'd made her feel really happy and welcome because I hadn't rushed her. It felt great to know that I'd had that effect on Claire's evening.