

For professionals working in health, social care, education, housing, employability, community services and the voluntary sector

What this guide will help you to do

- Understand the common ways neurological conditions can affect people's lives
- Communicate more effectively and compassionately
- Recognise when additional or specialist support may be needed
- Support carers and family members appropriately

Understanding neurological conditions

Neurological conditions affect the nervous system, including the brain, spine, and peripheral nerves.

Neurological conditions can affect people at any age and often fluctuate over time. Many people experience additional challenges, including mental health difficulties, learning disabilities, or other long-term conditions.

There are over 600 neurological conditions, ranging from common to very rare.

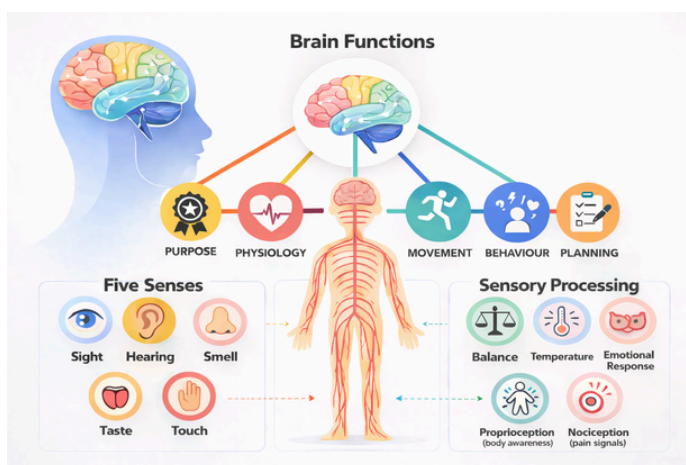
- Some conditions are present from birth
- Some develop following brain or spinal injury
- Some occur after viral infection
- Some are hereditary, whilst others are entirely random

No two people experience a neurological condition in the same way and many conditions are invisible.

Supporting carers & family members

Carers and family members often provide essential practical and emotional support.

- Ask who supports the person at home
- Recognise that carers may need support themselves
- Signpost carers to appropriate services and resources



Above all else, be patient, understanding and compassionate

How can neurological conditions affect us?

Cognition and memory

Some neurological conditions affect thinking and memory. This may include: Memory loss or forgetfulness; difficulty concentrating or processing information; impulsivity or reduced emotional control; reduced awareness of self or others.

In some conditions, these difficulties can worsen over time and may increase support needs.

Medication & treatment

Many people with neurological conditions take prescribed medication and may: Require support with medication management; experience side effects; and may need flexibility around appointments or routines.

Communication, speech and swallow

Some conditions affect the muscles or brain processes involved in communication. This may impact: Speech clarity; understanding spoken language; swallow; and expressing thoughts and needs.

Communication difficulties should not be assumed to reflect cognitive ability.

Mental health, emotional and social impact

The emotional and social impact of having a neurological condition cannot be underestimated. Fear, anxiety, loneliness, isolation, relationships with family and friends and access to the labour market are all impacted.

Anyone with a neurological condition may need support through social prescribing and being connected to a community link worker.

Pain and fatigue

Pain and fatigue are among the most common and disabling impacts of neurological conditions. Fatigue may be persistent and unpredictable.

- Pain can be chronic and difficult to manage
- Both can affect concentration, mood, and daily functioning
- Fatigue is often misunderstood and underestimated

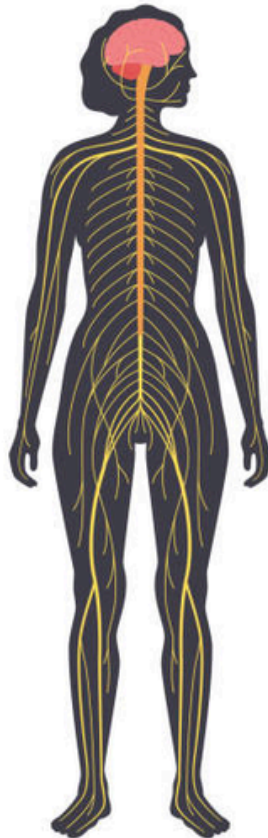
Sensory change: visual and hearing difficulties

Neurological damage can affect how sensory information is received or processed. This may include: Visual impairment or visual processing difficulties; hearing loss or sound sensitivity and other sensory sensitivities (e.g. light, touch, noise).

Bladder and bowel

Some neurological conditions affect bladder and bowel function, which may result in: Urgency; incontinence; anxiety or embarrassment.

These impacts are often hidden but can have a major effect on dignity and quality of life.



Mobility, balance and co-ordination

Neurological conditions can affect how the brain sends signals to muscles. This may result in: Weakness or muscle wasting; tremor or involuntary movement; seizures; difficulties with balance and coordination.

These challenges can significantly affect independence, confidence, and safety.

How to support someone with a neurological condition

Some neurological conditions including dementia, cause a loss of executive function. People may lose the ability to manage activities of daily living and the world around them can become challenging. For anyone with any neurological condition, it is important to acknowledge that they are living with a condition that can be hard to manage, and talk about it if the person wishes.

Ask the person what matters to them

Do not finish other people's sentences

Avoid making assumptions or judgements

Allow time to process information and respond

Be aware of non-verbal communication

Be prepared to repeat information

Avoid using complicated terms or overwhelming with information



Learning a little about a person's specific condition can be helpful — but remember that everyone's experience is unique.

Stay calm and reduce distress

About the Neurological Alliance of Scotland

The Neurological Alliance of Scotland is the national umbrella body of nearly 60 organisations with expertise across many of the 600 known neurological conditions. We represent people with a neurological condition and those who support them. We work to improve the care, support and understanding of neurological conditions across Scotland

This resource is designed for training delivery, professional development, and digital use. It can be used as a standalone learning aid or alongside facilitated training.

Find out more about the Neurological Alliance and the work that we do:

www.scottishneurological.org.uk

Further Information and Resources

- Explore condition-specific organisations via our [members directory](#).
- Access reliable health information through [NHS Inform](#)
- Find out about [Community Link Workers](#)

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