



DementiaUK

Helping families face dementia



**Making the
home dementia
friendly and safe**

Making the home dementia friendly and safe

Dementia can have a significant impact on a person's daily life, including how well they function within their home. Memory problems and the ability to co-ordinate, recognise and interpret the home environment can cause safety issues and frustration. The person's difficulties can also be exacerbated by other health conditions which may be affecting their sight and mobility.

To help the person with dementia maintain their independence and support a good quality of life, it's important to make the home as easy to manage as possible. Try to involve the person with dementia in decisions about any changes that are made. If this is not possible, make sure decisions are taken in the person's best interests.

Not all changes have to be expensive. With some simple adjustments, a home can become safer and more dementia friendly.



Light and noise

Light is exceptionally important for someone with dementia as it helps with orientation, well-being and reduces the risk of falls. To increase the amount of light in your house you could try:

- creating more natural light by pushing back curtains and taking down unnecessary net curtains or blinds
- having light-coloured curtains, if possible, to help reflect daylight
- installing lightbulbs with a high wattage
- placing the person's favourite chair by a window so they get more natural daylight and can look outside to see what is going on
- using portable low-level lights or a plug-in night light in hallways to aid orientation at night.

At night time you might like to use heavy curtains in the bedroom to aid sleep.

Overstimulation can cause agitation and distress in people affected by dementia, as it can be difficult to concentrate on more than one thing at a time. Try to reduce unnecessary background noise from TV and radio, unless you are using them. If the person lives in a busy environment with other people, it's important that they have a quiet space to retreat to if necessary.

Fire safety

It is important that the home is as safe as possible from fire. To prevent unnecessary risks to your home or the home of the person living with dementia, you could try:

- contacting your local fire service who can provide a free home safety check to identify risks within the home and, depending whether you're eligible, fit a smoke alarm for free
- arranging for smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and heat detectors to be fitted throughout the home
- making sure the batteries on smoke alarms are checked regularly
- buying fire retardant bedding and throws for furniture
- getting gas and electric appliances checked annually
- speaking to the gas supplier about fitting an isolation valve on the cooker to prevent gas from running too long if the oven is turned on and unattended
- purchasing a cooker guard for electric ovens which cuts the power before the temperature gets too high or when the pre-set time has elapsed
- sticking clear, typed-up instructions on devices that use heat. For example, you could remind the person that foil and metal do not go in the microwave or to turn the iron off at the plug.

Minimising falls at home

People living with dementia are at an increased risk of falling, and may also find it harder to recover afterwards. It's always important to work out the cause of a fall so that you can take steps to prevent them in the future. If you're worried about the person's mobility you could purchase a personal alarm for them so that they can seek help if they have a fall.

To minimise falls around the house you might like to try:

- removing rugs as they can be loose and easy to trip over
- making sure the person has footwear or slippers that fit properly and aren't loose
- looking out for any other trip hazards, including objects and wires on the floor
- keeping essential objects within easy reach of the person with dementia, such as glasses or television remotes
- reminding the person not to rush or carry too much at once.

Labelling and signage

Signage can help guide a person around their house if they no longer recognise some of the rooms or cupboards. Simply sticking labels on doors or everyday items can be really useful to help a person retain independence and allow them to continue carrying out their daily routines. However, it's important not to introduce too many new systems at once as it could create confusion.

Start small and with the things that are the most important to the person. Signs should be clear, easy-to-understand and put up at eye level. You can find images and signs online and print them off, or purchase metal signs from a shop that sells assistive living aids.

An example of helpful signage could be using pictures of a toilet, sink and bath on the bathroom door. Or, if the person struggles to remember what's in a set of drawers, you could try labelling each draw with what's inside, or sticking on pictures if they find reading challenging.

In the bedroom

Bedrooms are often a safe and relaxing space for us to unwind. It's important for everyone to have somewhere to get ready each morning and to sleep well each night. There are a few ways you can make a bedroom safer and easier to navigate for someone who has dementia:

- reduce clutter in their room so that they can get dressed easily and move around at night if they need to without tripping over
- try laying out clothes for them each morning, as picking out suitable clothes in a stuffed wardrobe can be overwhelming
- buy a movement or bed sensor that will let you know if the person gets out of bed, so that you can help them around the house if you need to
- fit a plastic mattress cover to the bed if the person is incontinent of urine, or buy body-worn continence products to protect the skin and bed overnight
- put a clock in the person's field of view that is set to the right time and date to help them attune to the time of day.

In the bathroom

Changes to make the bathroom safer and more dementia friendly don't need to mean remodelling; a few small tweaks could make a big difference. Colour and contrast are key to helping someone navigate the room. You could try:

- leaving the light on in the bathroom at night so it's easier to find
- having a toilet lid and seat that contrasts with the colour of the toilet pan for visual ease

- removing toilet and bath mats so that they aren't slipped on or mistaken for a barrier
- having a free standing toilet paper holder that is easy to see
- using toilet paper that is a contrasting colour to the holder, walls and floor
- choosing bath towels in a different colour to the wall, so they stand out
- installing grab rails to aid safety and mobility in the bathroom, which should also contrast with the wall
- using flood and scald prevention plugs to make sure that if a bath is unattended then excess water will be released down the plughole. These are available from most shops that sell assistive products.



In the kitchen

Lots of happy memories are made in the kitchen, but when a family member has dementia many people worry about this environment and the potential hazards posed by appliances and uncooked food. Making sure that everything the person may need is in easy reach and having clear instructions and labels for commonly used kitchen equipment can help. You could also try:

- removing clutter to make the kitchen as easy-to-use and accessible as possible
- taking off cupboard doors so that it's easy to see what is inside, or having clear cupboard doors, or labelling cupboards
- marking hot and cold taps, either by writing the words on labels or by using red and blue stickers
- using plain plates with a coloured solid band to make the food stand out
- contrasting the plate with a different coloured place mat or tablecloth to make the food easier to find
- keeping on top of use-by dates and having regular clear-outs
- looking into products that can help to maintain independence and safety, such as electric kettles that switch off automatically, jar openers and dementia friendly chopping boards and graters
- keeping toxic cleaning products in a locked cupboard and out of harm's reach.

Walls and flooring

Walls and floors are difficult to change, but if you are considering redecorating a room, or if the person living with dementia is moving somewhere new, there are a few things that could make the environment cosier and more accessible for them:

- where possible have matt flooring and walls as anything shiny may be mistaken for being wet or slippery
- choose one block colour rather than patterns as decoration can cause confusion
- keep flooring the same throughout the property as people may misinterpret changes in floor colour as a step or pool of water and could avoid stepping onto it
- keep walls a different colour from the floor to avoid confusion.



Memory aids

We all need prompting from time to time. If the person with dementia is having trouble remembering where they keep things, you could try:

- keeping important items in the same place, e.g. keys, money, notebooks, medication, phone book etc.
- using a white board to have reminders for the person, which can include appointments or events
- purchasing a large calendar clock which indicates the day, date and the time.

Useful websites

There are a number of useful websites where you can obtain aids and assistive technology for people with dementia to help make day-to-day activities easier to manage. We recommend that you think carefully about the person's needs as some aids may work for some people and not others.

- AT Dementia www.atdementia.org.uk
- Adaptawear www.adaptawear.com
- Complete Care Shop www.completecareshop.co.uk
- Modern Living Aids www.modernlivingaids.co.uk
- Unforgettable www.unforgettable.org

An occupational therapist can provide practical support and advice to help maintain the person's independence and day-to-day activities. They will be able to advise on the best adaptations and specialist devices. Speak to your GP or local social services department to arrange an appointment.

For a private occupational therapy assessment, contact the British Association of Occupational Therapists and College of Occupational Therapists. Call 020 7357 6480 or visit www.cotss-ip.org.uk

The British Association of Occupational Therapists is the professional body for all occupational therapy staff in the UK and the Royal College of Occupational Therapists operates as a registered charity:

www.rcot.co.uk

Disabled Living Foundation is a charity that provides information about help with independent living, e.g. mobility aids.

T: 0845 130 9177 (helpline 10am – 4pm weekdays)

E: info@dlf.org.uk W: www.dlf.org.uk

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Our Admiral Nurses can help

If you have any questions or concerns please contact our Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline to speak to a specialist dementia nurse.

Call **0800 888 6678** or email helpline@dementiauk.org

Opening hours:

Monday – Friday, 9am – 9pm

Saturday – Sunday, 9am – 5pm

The information in this booklet is written and reviewed by Admiral Nurses.

Publication date: June 2017

Review date: June 2019

© Dementia UK 2017



If you're caring for someone with dementia or if you have any other concerns or questions, call or email our Admiral Nurses for specialist support and advice.

Call **0800 888 6678** or email **helpline@dementiauk.org**

Open Monday – Friday, 9am – 9pm

Saturday and Sunday, 9am – 5pm

@DementiaUK • **www.dementiauk.org**

Dementia UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1039404) and Scotland (SC047429).