

Making the home safe and comfortable for a person with dementia



Dementia can have a significant impact on a person's daily life, including how well they function within their home. Memory issues or problems recognising and interpreting the objects around them can cause frustration and may create safety issues.

Many people with dementia – especially older people – also have vision or hearing impairments or other health conditions which might affect their sight and mobility, making the home harder to navigate.

To help the person with dementia maintain their independence and a good quality of life, it's important to make their home as safe, comfortable and easy to manage as possible.

Changes to a home do not have to be expensive. Often, simple adjustments are all it takes to help the person with dementia to stay independent and remain in their home for longer.

Adapting the home for a person with dementia

The best way to identify any possible hazards for the person with dementia is to take a room-by-room tour looking out for any adaptations you could make to keep them safer and more comfortable in their home.

If possible, try to involve the person with dementia in decisions about any changes you are making to their home. If this is not possible, always make sure decisions are taken in their best interests.

Outside the home

Keeping the outside of the home looking consistent can be really helpful for a person with dementia, especially if they sometimes become confused about where they are, so avoid making any significant changes to the exterior.

Maintaining the colour of the front door and looking after any lawn, trees or plants so that they do not change substantially can help the person recognise their home. A large door number can also be beneficial.



If the person with dementia is prone to trips or falls, you could fit a sturdy handrail to steps, or have them converted to a ramp. Ensure there is proper lighting in case they are coming or going in the dark – a motion sensor light means they won't have to remember to turn it on or off.

You may like to display a sticker requesting no junk mail or cold calls to the person's door or letterbox, or join a Neighbourhood Watch group and put its sticker on the door or window – please see Sources of support on p15 for details.

A doorbell with a video camera can be a useful safety measure to monitor who is coming to and going from the property.

You could also fit a key safe that can be opened by people who know the combination code so that family members, carers or emergency services can access the property if the person with dementia cannot open the door – but do not leave spare keys under a doormat or flowerpot.

The hallway

Some simple steps can make going out and coming home easier

for the person with dementia. These include:

- keeping the hallway uncluttered so it is easy to get through the front door
- hanging a clear, easy-to-read clock near the door, displaying the time, day and date
- keeping keys in a consistent place so they are easy to find – but make sure they're not visible from the outside. A drawer in a hallway table is ideal
- using gripper tape to secure doormats or carpet runners to the floor to reduce the risk of falls, or removing them completely
- fitting a door alarm if the person with dementia tends to try to leave the home unaccompanied – this can give family members who live with the person peace of mind, especially overnight

The kitchen

The kitchen can be a confusing and potentially hazardous place as a person's dementia progresses, but there are lots of steps you can take

to make this room safer and easier to navigate.

Making sure that everything the person may need is easy to use, easily identifiable and within reach can help, as can clear instructions and labels for commonly used kitchen equipment. You could consider:

- keeping cups, teabags, spoons and other commonly used items on the kitchen counter
- replacing solid cupboard doors with clear doors so that the contents are easy to see. If you can't do this, sticking a simple sign or photograph of the contents on the door may help. An alternative is to take the doors off, but be aware of the risk of things falling out of the cupboard
- clearly labelling hot and cold taps, either by writing the words on labels beside each tap, or if possible, replacing with 'hot' and 'cold' marked taps
- replacing patterned plates with plates in a single light colour (ideally white) to make the food stand out – this can be helpful

Occupational therapy

Occupational therapy aims to improve people's ability to carry out everyday tasks that they are finding difficult. Occupational Therapists can help to identify daily living equipment and home adaptations that may be helpful, such as mobility aids, products that help with eating and drinking, assistive technology and adaptive clothing that is easier to put on.

Occupational Therapists can suggest ways to modify daily tasks to make them more

manageable, and help people develop new skills that enable them to carry out essential activities. They can also carry out Home Assessments for people with dementia – see p13 for more information.

You can request an occupational therapy assessment through the person's GP or the local council. Alternatively, you can book a private occupational therapy appointment – please see Sources of support on p14 for more information.

for people who have problems with their vision. You can also use place mats in a different colour from the plate to make it easy to see

- keeping on top of use-by dates and regularly clearing out of foods that are out of date, particularly in the fridge
- looking into adaptive products that help to maintain independence and safety, such as electric kettles that switch

off automatically, jar openers, modified chopping boards and graters etc – an Occupational Therapist can offer advice on what might be helpful (see the box above for more information about occupational therapy)

It is important to help the person with dementia stay as independent as possible while also recognising that the kitchen contains a number of safety hazards. To reduce the risk of accident, injury and fire, you could:

- keep toxic cleaning products in a locked cupboard
- put commonly used items in a bottom cupboard so the person does not need to climb to get to them
- speak to your gas supplier about fitting a gas valve limiter to the cooker – these are usually free to install and prevent the gas being left on or switched on unintentionally
- use a flood and scald prevention plug in the sink – if the tap is left on, these automatically drain water away once it gets to a certain depth. They also change colour to indicate if the water is too hot

The living room

The living room should be relaxing and cosy, so make sure chairs are comfortable and offer good support. Assistive furniture, which helps people stand up and sit down, can be very useful – although sometimes expensive.

The living room is a good place to put up photos which can reassure the person with dementia and act

as a memory aid. Make sure the photos are meaningful, familiar and from a recognisable time – for example school photos or wedding portraits.

If the person with dementia struggles to operate the television, you can buy a simple remote control with large, clearly labelled buttons – these work with most televisions.

Voice assistants (such as Google, Alexa or Siri) can be very useful. For example, they can be programmed to perform tasks like turning lights on and off, playing music, reading audiobooks and giving reminders. It's best if the person learns how to use their device in the early stages of dementia to avoid confusion.

Some people with dementia experience 'sundowning' – a sense of intense confusion or of being in the wrong place which often occurs at dusk. Fitting heavy curtains and drawing them at the same time each day may help to ease the transition from day to night and reduce distress. See Sources of support on p14 for more information on sundowning.



Electric fires or heaters could be accidentally left on or tripped over, so it's safest not to use them. If the person tends to get cold, leave a blanket within easy reach of their chair.

The bedroom

It's important for everyone to have a safe and relaxing place to sleep at night and enough space to get ready in the morning.

- Try to reduce clutter in the bedroom, so there is lots of room for the person with dementia to get into and out of bed safely, and get dressed and undressed
- Some people with dementia can find choosing clothes from

drawers or wardrobes difficult, particularly those that are suitable for the weather. You could consider laying out clothes for the morning

- A movement or bed sensor will let you know if the person gets out of bed so that you can help them if you need to, giving you peace of mind
- If the person is incontinent, fit a waterproof mattress cover on the bed and ensure that any incontinence pads or pants are comfortable and will last the night. See Sources of support on p14 for our information on continence

- Choose bedding and nightwear that are appropriate for the weather and keep the person comfortable during the night – if they are too hot or cold, they are more likely to wake up
- Use a touch-operated bedside light or a night light in the room or on the landing so the person can see if they get up during the night
- An easy-to-read clock on the bedside table or wall may help the person know when it is time to get up, and when to try to sleep
- fitting a toilet lid and seat in a different colour from the toilet itself so that it is easy for the person to see, and leaving the toilet lid up so they don't have to lift it
- removing toilet and bathmats – these can be trip hazards, and some people with dementia have difficulties with their vision, where patterns or contrasts on the floor can look like a hole or other obstacle
- using a free-standing holder for toilet paper – these are easy to see, but be aware that they may be a trip hazard and are best avoided if the person is prone to falls

The bathroom

Using colour and contrast can help to make the bathroom easier to navigate – and therefore safer – for the person with dementia. You could try:

- sticking a written sign or a picture of a toilet to the door to help the person locate the bathroom
- leaving the bathroom light on at night so the person can find their way to it easily
- choosing toilet paper that is a different colour from the holder, walls and floor
- choosing bath towels in a different colour from the wall so they stand out
- installing grab rails at useful points around the bathroom such as in the bath/shower and next to the toilet, ideally in a different colour to the wall



- using flood and scald prevention plugs to stop the sink and bath overflowing by releasing excess water down the plughole if the taps are left running
- Choose a block colour for walls and flooring rather than patterns, which can cause confusion

Walls and floors

Walls and floors can be difficult to change, but if you are redecorating, or if the person living with dementia is moving somewhere new, there are a few things that you could consider.

- Where possible, choose matt flooring and walls, as shiny surfaces can appear wet or slippery to a person with dementia
- Paint walls a different colour from the floors
- If possible, try to keep one consistent colour or style running along the floor throughout, and another one for the walls – changes in pattern or colour can look like an obstacle or a step
- Ensure floors are completely dry after mopping to reduce the risk of slipping

Preventing falls

There are many things you can do to reduce the risk of falls throughout the home. These include:

- making sure there is no unnecessary clutter on the floor – it's especially important that wires and leads are secured and not left trailing
- removing rugs or making sure they are secured or stuck down
- removing any chairs, stools or tables with thin legs that could be tripped over
- considering a personal alarm that the person can press to summon help if they fall – these are usually worn on a cord around the neck. Your local authority can offer advice on 'telecare' services offering this in your area
- making sure the person's shoes and slippers fit properly and aren't loose – avoid backless slip-on styles
- keeping essential objects such as glasses and the TV remote control in a set place within easy reach so the person does not have to keep getting up

- installing bannisters or rails to support the person getting up and down the stairs and moving around the home and garden
- ensuring that the person is in good general physical health – health problems like dehydration, constipation and poor nutrition may lead to unsteadiness
- reminding the person not to rush or carry too much at once

Fire safety

It is important that the home is as safe as possible from fire.

Fitting smoke alarms throughout is vital – ideally, there should be one in the hallway, landing, and every 'habitable' room (eg living, dining and bedrooms – but not bathrooms) and a heat sensor in the kitchen. If possible, alarms should be mains powered rather than battery powered, and interlinked so that if one goes off, the rest do too.

It's important to test alarms once a month, even if they are wired into the mains. Be aware that mains powered alarms should usually be

replaced completely every 10 years.

If the alarms are battery powered, batteries should be replaced every six months, even if they don't appear to be flat. Never remove batteries from an alarm (eg to silence it if it goes off while cooking) in case you forget to put them back.

Carbon monoxide detectors should be fitted in every room with a fuel-burning appliance such as a gas boiler, gas fire, open fire or wood burner.

Most fire services offer free safety checks to identify risks within the home. If you're eligible, they may also fit smoke alarms for free. Contact your local fire station for advice.

Light and noise

A home that is well-lit during the day and dim and cosy at night can help keep the person with dementia safe and comfortable. You could try:

- installing lightbulbs with a high wattage
- placing the person's favourite chair by a window so they get plenty of daylight and can look outside to see what is going on
- using portable low-level lights or plug-in night lights in hallways to help them see at night
- fitting heavy curtains in the bedroom to help the person sleep – especially in the summer when mornings and evenings are lighter
- using timer plugs on lamps so they switch on and off at appropriate times

Noisy environments may lead to agitation and distress in people affected by dementia, making it more difficult for them to concentrate and follow conversations.

Try to reduce unnecessary background noise, for example by switching off the TV and radio when they are not actively being used (although some people find it comforting to have favourite music or a radio station playing quietly –

be guided by your knowledge of the person and what they have enjoyed in the past).

If the person lives in a busy environment with other people, try to set aside a quiet space for them to retreat to easily if they are feeling overwhelmed, for example their bedroom.

Labels and signs

If the person has started forgetting where rooms are or struggles to remember what is in cupboards, using labels may help them keep their independence and allow them to continue with their daily routines.

For example, you could put pictures of a toilet, bath and sink on the bathroom door, or stick pictures of teacups and teabags to the cupboard where they are kept.

Signs should be clear, easy to understand, and at eye level. You can find images and signs online and print them off or buy signs from a shop that sells assistive living aids.

It is important not to introduce too many new labels at once as this could create confusion, so start by putting just a few signs on the

things that will be the most useful to the person.

Memory aids

If the person with dementia is having trouble remembering where they keep things, you could try:

- keeping important items in a consistent, easily accessible place. These may include keys, money, mobile phone, medication, a list of important phone numbers etc
- hanging a whiteboard or blackboard somewhere conspicuous to write reminders for the person, such as appointments, events and when visitors are coming
- displaying a large calendar clock showing the day, date and time
- setting audible reminders on the person's phone or smart speaker – but think about what sort of voice will be most reassuring for the person, and least likely to cause distress or confusion (for example, some people find a female voice more comforting than a male one)

Requesting a Home Assessment

If you would like help identifying what adaptations and equipment could help the person with dementia stay safe and comfortable at home, you can ask your local council for a Home Assessment.

This is normally carried out by an Occupational Therapist. They will usually visit the person at home to assess what they are having difficulty with. They will ask questions about how the person is managing everyday tasks like washing, dressing, cooking and moving around the home. Try to be as specific as possible so they can assess what support the person would benefit from.

After the assessment, the Occupational Therapist will write a report detailing what care and support the person needs.

Small adaptations that cost under £1,000 may be paid for by the local council: for example grab rails, automatic outdoor



lighting, or a ramp to access the home.

Larger adaptations like fitting a stairlift or wet room are not usually paid for by the council, but the person may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant .

For more information on Home Assessments and Disabled Facilities Grants, see Sources of support on p15.

Sources of support

If you would like to speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse about making the home safe and comfortable for a person with dementia or any other aspect of dementia, please call our free Helpline on **0800 888 6678** (Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm, every day except 25th December) or email [**helpline@dementiauk.org**](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

If you would prefer to pre-book a phone or video call with an Admiral Nurse, please visit [**dementiauk.org/get-support/closer-to-home**](https://dementiauk.org/get-support/closer-to-home)

Dementia UK information

Sundowning

[**dementiauk.org/sundowning**](https://dementiauk.org/sundowning)

Continence

[**dementiauk.org/continence**](https://dementiauk.org/continence)

Finding help and support at home

[**dementiauk.org/finding-help-assistance**](https://dementiauk.org/finding-help-assistance)

Financial and legal sources of support

[**dementiauk.org/sources-of-support-and-advice**](https://dementiauk.org/sources-of-support-and-advice)

Other sources of support

Royal College of Occupational Therapists – find an

Occupational Therapist

[**rcot.co.uk/about-occupational-therapy/
find-occupational-therapist**](https://rcot.co.uk/about-occupational-therapy/find-occupational-therapist)

Disabled Living Foundation: impartial advice on daily living equipment and other aspects of independent living

[**livingmadeeasy.org.uk**](https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)



Neighbourhood Watch

ourwatch.org.uk

Disabled Facilities Grant

gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants

NHS information on falls

nhs.uk/conditions/falls

NHS information on Home Assessments

nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/care-services-equipment-and-care-homes/home-adaptations

London Fire Brigade home fire safety advice

london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home

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

We are always looking to improve our resources, to provide the most relevant support for families living with dementia. If you have feedback about any of our leaflets, please email feedback@dementiauk.org

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For more information on how to support Dementia UK, please visit dementiauk.org/donate or call **0300 365 5500**.
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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



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