What to bring to a mental health ward

This is a guide to what you may like to pack for a person with dementia who is admitted to a mental health ward, and what may not be permitted. You can ask ward staff for more information.

Do not worry if you are unable to gather all these things at the time of admission – you will be able to bring other items in when you visit.

You can use this checklist alongside our leaflet on mental health admissions for people with dementia, which can be found at dementiauk.org/mental-health-admissions

Clothing
On most mental health wards, people wear their normal clothes, so pack a few familiar and comfortable outfits.

- Label clothes with the person’s name or initials – using a permanent marker on the tags is quick and easy
- Pack night clothes and slippers
- Ensure the person has their glasses and hearing aids if needed
- Avoid items with belts, ties or strings – these may not be permitted for safety reasons (see What not to bring, p2)
- If the ward has access to outdoor space, pack weather-appropriate clothing, eg coat and gloves; or sunglasses and sunhat
- Ask the ward about laundry – some have facilities to wash and dry clothes, or you may need or choose to take the person’s clothes home to wash

Toiletries
- Pack a wash bag with the person’s usual toiletries
- Avoid packing glass bottles or sharp objects like razors and nail scissors as these may not be permitted or may have to be handed in for safety (see What not to bring, p2)
- Aerosols may not be permitted

Medication
- Take along any prescribed medication that the person is taking – you will need to hand this in
- If possible, print a copy of their latest prescription for the ward staff
- Let staff know if the person takes any over-the-counter medications or supplements – these will also need to be handed in
Familiar items
Familiar items may help the person with dementia feel more comfortable and settled in a new and confusing environment. You could pack:

- photo albums and photographs to put up around the room (glass frames may not be allowed)
- a favourite blanket or cushion
- activities like books, drawing supplies or puzzles
- an unbreakable travel mug
- favourite snacks

Personal information
It can be helpful to provide staff with some written information about the person – for example, their likes and dislikes – to help them tailor care to their individual needs. There are various templates that you could use, for example our life story template: please visit dementiauk.org/life-story-template

Valuables
Items sometimes go missing on mental health wards, so avoid taking in money or valuables (such as electronics or jewellery). However:

- Most wards have the facility to store small amounts of cash and/or bank cards – you can ask staff about this
- If the person does need to bring anything valuable, label it if possible and let staff know they have it
- A mobile phone or tablet can be helpful so the person can keep in touch, watch TV/films or listen to music, so ask the ward about keeping these devices safe and fully charged, and how they can support the person with dementia to make calls if they cannot do it independently

It is helpful to make a list of what the person takes to the ward so that you can check where items are when you visit and on discharge.

What not to bring
Most mental health wards have restrictions on certain items for the safety of the person, other patients and staff. Items that may not be allowed include:

- glass and other breakables – eg toiletries in glass bottles, photo frames, mugs
- scarves, ties, belts, dressing gown ties, shoes with laces, clothes or bags with drawstrings
- wires – eg headphones, phone chargers (you can ask the ward staff to charge the person’s phone)
- sharp items – eg razors, scissors, tweezers
- cigarettes/e-cigarettes/vapes
- lighters
- candles
- items with removable batteries
Support for you

To speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse about mental health admissions or any other aspect of dementia, please call our free Helpline on 0800 888 6678 (Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm) or email helpline@dementiauk.org

To book a phone or video call appointment with an Admiral Nurse in our virtual clinics, please visit dementiauk.org/book-an-appointment

For more information and advice on all aspects of dementia, please visit dementiauk.org