



Making your home dementia friendly





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Making your home dementia friendly

This booklet will be useful for people with dementia who want to remain living at home, and for friends and family members who are supporting them. It's based on research, and the personal experiences of people with dementia and the people who support them (family, friends and care professionals).

If you have dementia, living at home can give you more independence. By making some changes to your home, you can continue to enjoy it, and keep up routines and activities that are familiar to you. These changes can help you to stay safe, physically active, mentally stimulated and in touch with friends and family.

This booklet describes some of the ways to create a home that supports you as a person with dementia. Each section covers a different aspect of living at home. The sections list practical tips to make managing dementia at home easier. For some of these you may need help and support from friends, family members or health and social care professionals.

Everyone experiences dementia in their own way. You may need to try some of the ideas out to see what works best for you.





‘Smart’ devices like Amazon Echo, Google Home and Apple HomePod can help you live well with dementia at home. For example, by speaking aloud to a smart device, you can ask for the time or for a reminder of activities you had planned to do that day. You can play music, and control the television, radio, heating, lighting and even call friends and family. You need extra equipment, such as ‘smart’ lightbulbs which communicate with the smart device, to do some of these things. You’ll also need to have wireless internet (Wi-Fi) in your home.



For more information see factsheet 437,
Using technology to help with everyday life.



Lighting

Why is lighting important?

Good lighting helps you see clearly and make sense of where you are. You may find that you need a lot more light as you get older to be able to see properly. Dementia can make it harder to keep track of time and to understand where you are in your home. This is why it's important to allow natural light in through clean windows, and for your home to be well lit.

Better lighting can reduce dark areas and shadows on the floor, which can be confusing if you have dementia. Daylight coming through the windows will help you to keep track of the time of day. Dimmer switches will give you more control over the levels of light you need. If you get up in the night, sensor lights (which come on automatically as you move around) will help you to find your way. Keeping your bedroom dark will help you to sleep better.





Practical tips

- Check that natural light is coming in through the windows. Move curtains or blinds, furniture, TVs or plants so they don't block the light.
- Get the windows cleaned regularly.
- Use brighter bulbs in light fittings, if it's safe to do so, or use extra lighting such as lamps.
- Add sensor lights if you get up at night, or struggle to find light switches in the dark. These come on automatically when they sense motion.
- Add dimmer switches so you can adjust the lighting throughout the day and evening.
- Make sure your bedroom can be made dark, so you can sleep better.
- To make sure you can see the TV, adjust the settings, move other light sources such as lamps, or change the TV position to reduce glare.
- Keep floor lamps and wires out of the way. Touch-operated lamps are easier to use if finding switches is becoming more difficult.
- Consider asking an electrician to move plug sockets to places where they are easy to reach to switch on and off.



Furniture and furnishings

Why are furniture and furnishings important?

Dementia may make you feel disorientated or confused about what you are seeing. Colour and pattern can make a big difference to how easily you can find your way around your home.

Using bright and contrasting colours for furniture and furnishings can help you to see things more easily. Contrast the colours of furniture, including beds, tables, chairs and lamps with the walls and floor, so they stand out to you. Stripes or strong patterns can be confusing and disorientating, so simplify these where you can. As dementia progresses, paintings, artwork and mirrors may also start to be confusing, and you may need to remove these. If you replace or remove furniture, try not to change the layout of a room too much. Finding your way around is easier if you're familiar with your surroundings.





Practical tips

- Make sure you have some chairs with arms, as they are much easier to get out of. You might want to avoid backless and low chairs.
- Make sure furniture such as side tables or coffee tables aren't in your way.
- Check pictures and mirrors and cover or remove them if they are causing you confusion.
- Try not to move things around too often. Keeping a familiar environment can help you to find your way around.
- Make sure the colour of switches for lights and appliances contrasts with the wall so you can find them.
- Replace furnishings that have stripes or strong patterns, for example rugs.
- Use furniture and plain coloured furnishings that contrast with the walls and floors so that they can be easily seen.
- Use plain, brightly coloured bed and table linen that contrasts with the walls and floor.
- Choose items to help with finding your way around, such as a house plant to show the way to the garden or outdoor space.



Flooring

Why is flooring important?

You should be able to move safely and easily around your home, without the risk of trips or falls. It's very easy to trip over uneven floors or mats. Changes in the colour of the floor from room to room, rugs and dark floor mats can all be confusing. Dementia can change how you see things. Shiny floors can look wet or slippery, speckles in carpets or tiles may look like litter, and dark coloured rugs or flooring can look like holes in the floor.

You'll be able to walk more confidently and safely over plain matt flooring. The colour of the floor, particularly on stairs, should contrast with the walls, so you can clearly see where you are going.





Practical tips

- Remove floor mats and rugs as they can cause trips and falls.
- Lay plain coloured matt flooring or carpet throughout the home.
- Check that wires and cables for lights and other appliances are tucked neatly away and won't be a trip hazard.
- Ensure any carpet edging or cover strips holding the carpet down are a similar colour to the flooring.
- Clearly show the edges of stairs and steps with brightly coloured tape, paint, or special stair edging called 'nosing'.



Eating and drinking

Why is eating and drinking important?

Eating and drinking well is important for your health. However, you may find that you have a reduced appetite, lose your interest in preparing meals or don't eat at set mealtimes. You may also find it difficult to see food if it's the same colour as the plate, or find it difficult to see your plate if it is a similar colour to the table.





Practical tips

- Make sure the items you use every day are easy to find and easy to reach.
- Use brightly coloured cloths, tea towels and kitchen rolls that contrast with surfaces and appliances.
- Make sure that appliances such as kettles can be seen and are easy to use.
- Use coloured crockery that contrasts with the food you are going to eat, as well as the table or tablecloth.
- To make sure you drink enough, consider using a reminder on your phone or tablet. You can also buy reminder devices that sit underneath your cup or mug like a coaster, and which will light up or remind you to have a drink.
- Keep the table clear of clutter at meal times.
- Use clear plastic containers to store food so that you can see what's inside. Write on them with a marker pen or use sticky labels to record the date you put them in the fridge or freezer.
- If you need to replace equipment or appliances, like a kettle, try and make sure they're the same design or model as the old one. That will make it easier to remember how to use them.



Using the bathroom

Why is using the bathroom important?

Not being able to find the toilet when you need it can make you feel anxious. The toilet seat and lid should be in a contrasting colour to the rest of the toilet, so they are easier to see. You could also remove the lid to make the seat and bowl easier to see. If you need grab rails to help you get on and off the toilet, and in and out of the bath or shower, make them a different colour to the walls. This will make them easier to find.

Traditional-style or lever taps that are marked hot and cold, and a traditional toilet flush are more obvious, and easy to use. Basin, bath and shower fixtures should be easy to control and use. You can use flood prevention plugs which release water down the drain if a bath is left running for too long. Some change colour if the bath is too hot, to prevent scalding.

Bathrooms can get crowded with items that you do not use every day, and this can be distracting.





Practical tips

- Keep things you use every day within easy reach and put away anything else that creates clutter.
- Use towels and toilet rolls in contrasting colours to the wall or holder, to make them easier to see.
- Use non-slip mats in the bath and shower.
- Put a sign with a picture of a toilet and the word 'Toilet' on the door at a height where you can see it easily. Or, leave the door open so you can clearly find the bathroom.
- Try leaving the bathroom light on during the night, or use sensor lights. These turn on automatically when they sense movement.
- Put in easy-to-use taps. If there are separate hot and cold taps, make sure they are clearly marked hot or cold.
- Make sure that toilet, bath and shower switches and controls are familiar and easy to use.
- Use a flood prevention plug in the basin and the bath.
- Change any door locks so that they can be easily opened from the outside in an emergency.
- Remove the bin if it might be mistaken for the toilet.



Knowing where things are

Why is knowing where things are important?

If you have memory problems, you may forget where you keep things. Putting pictures or labels on the outside of cupboards, wardrobes and drawers can help with this. They can also help you make sense of your home. Transparent cupboard doors or open shelves will make it easier for you to find things. Try to organise your cupboards so that items and appliances that you regularly use are to the front or are easy to find. Think about removing cupboard doors which hide white goods, such as washing machines. It's important that you know where the things you use every day are, and that you can find them easily.



Carers, friends and family should also put items back to the same storage place. Remind them that this helps you to find things when you need them.



Practical tips

- Always keep important items such as your keys, glasses, wallet or purse, and phone in the same place. You could use a clear plastic box or large bowl to put them in.
- Make sure that people close to you know where important items or documents are kept, in case you can't find them or there is an emergency. If they move things, they should check with you first.
- Label cupboards and drawers with pictures or text telling you what is inside.
- Make sure appliances are easy to find.
- Consider taking the doors off cupboards and wardrobes if it is safe to do this.
- Fit cupboards with non-reflective, transparent and shatterproof fronts so you can see inside.
- Leave the bathroom and kitchen doors open when not in use so you can easily locate them.



Keeping things in order

Why is keeping things in order important?

Clutter around your home may make you feel confused and distracted. It can also make it difficult for you to find things that you often use. Items left on the floor can lead to trips and falls. Noise and other distractions can make concentration difficult, so try to reduce these as much as possible. Turn off the TV or radio when you're not using them.





Practical tips

- Remove clutter and unused items (such as old newspapers) but make sure your home still feels personal to you.
- Consider having a basket or tray for important paperwork or letters.
- Make sure that cupboards and drawers are tidy so it's easy to find things.
- Remove any unnecessary cushions or throws.
- Put things back where they belong when you have finished with them.
- Buy more cupboards or put up open shelves if you need more space to store things.
- If you can't find something, ask someone to help you. You could take a break and try again later.



Keeping safe

Why is keeping safe important?

Feeling safe and confident in your home is very important. If you live alone, it's especially important to put in measures to keep yourself safe. There are different types of grab rails, alarms and sensors, including smoke detectors, that can be installed to help you stay safe.

Professionals, for example occupational therapists, the fire and rescue service or home improvement agencies, can help you make your home safe. It's also important to keep your home at an appropriate temperature throughout the seasons to prevent you getting too hot or too cold.

Keeping safe at home also means making sure that other people don't take advantage of you. Unfortunately, older or more vulnerable people are often targeted. Tricks and scams can take many forms – for example, someone might try to convince you to pay for a service or product that does not exist, or pay too much. Someone may also try to get your personal information or bank details, or pretend to be someone they are not to be let into your home to steal from you.

It's important to keep yourself safe from scams and doorstep sellers. For more information see **booklet 1502, Keeping safe at home**. You can also safeguard yourself against telephone scams. For more information see **factsheet 437, Using technology to help with everyday life**.





Practical tips

- Safely put away any potentially hazardous or sharp items.
- Make sure the TV, radio and any other electrical items are switched off if not in use, as they may cause a fire.
- Check your thermostat settings as the weather changes.
- If possible, reduce the temperature of hot water on your boiler to avoid scalds.
- Make sure ICE (in case of emergency) numbers are clear and near your telephone. These are contacts that someone would call on your behalf in an emergency, such as a partner, carer, friends or family.
- Consider using socket covers if sockets are not being used.
- Get gas or electric fires checked for safety.
- Check that door handles and locks are easy to see and use. Consider a chain and peephole on the front door.
- Consider installing grab rails on stairs or along long walls.
- Remember, you do not need to open the door if you don't know the person.
- It can be reassuring to have someone you know at home with you if you need to have a visitor. For example, if a tradesperson needs to check your gas meter or carry out checks and improvements on your home. The tradesperson should always make appointments in advance, so you know to expect them.



Keeping active and engaged

Why is keeping active and engaged important?

Keeping active and engaged can help you to live well with dementia. Try to continue doing your favourite things and stay in contact with people. Having the internet at home makes keeping in touch and finding things to do much easier. A clock and calendar will help you remember the time and date so you don't miss appointments or events. Going for a short walk or outing every day can boost your mood and improve your health. Doing some light exercises at home can also be a good idea.



For more information see factsheet 529, **Physical activity and exercise** and booklet 1506, **Keeping active and involved**.





Practical tips

- Make sure you can see a large-faced clock and calendar.
- Check your telephone is easy to use.
- Put a photo of a friend or family member next to their telephone number, to help you remember who to call.
- Consider buying a tablet or smartphone as these can be useful for things like video calls with family and friends.
- Make use of 'smart' devices to help to remind you about appointments.
- Put a whiteboard where you can see it easily, so you can write reminders of things you need to do. You might prefer to use a notebook.
- Make sure items like puzzles, photographs or books are easy to find.
- Look at gentle exercises you can do in the home, including chair or bed exercises.
- If you use the internet and talk to people on social media, be careful not to share any personal information online.
- Check that your TV and radio are easy to use. Tune the radio to your favourite station.



Getting outside

Why is getting outside important?

Being able to see and get outside throughout the year can improve your wellbeing. Gardening or enjoying nature can be very therapeutic. Make sure you can see the outside through your windows. Not only can this allow you to sit and watch what's happening outside, it can also help you to dress for the weather before leaving.

If your front door is easy to recognise, this will help prevent you from feeling disorientated. If you worry that you might forget to take your keys when you go out, consider using a keysafe. This is a secure box next to your front door with a combination code, where you can keep a spare key.

You might need some encouragement to get outside, so go with a friend, carer or family member and enjoy it together.





Practical tips

- Take opportunities to get outdoors throughout the year.
- Make sure you can see the outside through your windows.
- Check that the front door is easy to tell apart from the others in the road or block.
- Consider using a keysafe next to your front door.
- Make sure that the door lock and keys are easy to use.
- Check that any paving or steps are safe and even.
- Make sure that there's somewhere sheltered to sit outside, where you can rest.



Letting others know about changes

Let family members, friends and care workers who visit you at home understand that you have arranged your home so that it's a supportive and safe environment.

Ask them not to move your furniture or sort out your cupboards unless you are sure you want this done. If you do, make sure you do this together so you can remember where things go.

Ask people who support you to put back any items they have taken out of cupboards or off shelves. Make sure they return furniture to its proper place before they leave.

If they are close to you, you might want to tell them where you keep important items and documents in case you need help finding them.







Checklist

This checklist will help you remember some of the main changes you can put in place to manage dementia at home.

You may not want or need to complete everything on this checklist. It's important to remember that everyone experiences dementia differently. Make the changes you think will work best for you.



Lighting

- Check that nothing is blocking the windows and that they are clean.
- Use brighter bulbs or extra lights to see clearly around your home.
- Make sure the bedroom can be made dark at night.
- Use touch-operated lamps if finding switches is difficult.
- Make adjustments so you can clearly see the TV.





Furniture and furnishings

- Check that furniture isn't in your way.
- Check that furniture and furnishings contrast with the walls and floors, and don't have stripes or busy patterns.
- Use bright, contrasting linen.
- Make sure light switches contrast with the wall.
- Remove any mirrors or pictures that may be confusing.
- If you replace furniture, try not to change the layout of the room too much.



Flooring

- Remove mats and rugs.
- Lay plain matt flooring.
- Check that wires and cables are not a trip hazard.
- Make sure carpet edging and cover strips are a similar colour to the flooring.
- Outline edges of stairs.





Eating and drinking

- Make items and appliances you use every day easy to find and use.
- Use crockery that contrasts with your food and with the table.
- Use clearly labelled plastic containers for storage.
- Keep the table and kitchen clutter to a minimum.
- Use eating and drinking reminder devices.



Using the bathroom

- Use a coloured toilet seat or remove the lid.
- Put a sign on the door to remind you where the toilet is.
- Use a flood-safe plug.
- Make sure bath, basin, shower controls and the door lock are familiar and easy to use.





Knowing where things are

- Label cupboards and drawers.
- Make appliances easy to find.
- Put transparent fronts on cupboards and wardrobes, or remove doors.
- Always keep important items in the same place.
- Leave the bathroom and kitchen doors open when not in use so you can easily locate them.



Keeping things in order

- Remove clutter, including unnecessary cushions and throws.
- Consider a basket or tray for paperwork.
- Keep shelves and cupboards tidy.
- Get extra cupboards and shelves.
- Keep things in the same place so you can always find them, and ask visitors to put things back if they move them.





Keeping safe

- Put away hazardous items.
- Check water temperature and thermostat are set at the appropriate temperature.
- Check gas or electric fires for safety.
- Consider installing grab rails.
- Check that door handles and locks are easy to see and use.
- Consider a chain and peephole on the front door.
- If you are unsure, do not let someone into your home, pay them or give them your details.





Keeping active and involved

- Keep doing the things you enjoy.
- Make sure you can see a clock and calendar.
- Check the telephone, TV and radio are easy to use.
- Make use of 'smart' devices to help to remind you about appointments.
- Put a whiteboard where you can see it easily, so you can write reminders of things you need to do. You might prefer to use a notebook.
- Do gentle exercise.



Getting outside

- Take opportunities to go outside all year round and make sure you can see outside.
- Have a sheltered area outside where you can sit and rest, if possible.
- Make sure you can use the front door lock easily.
- Check that any paving and steps are safe.





Other useful organisations

There are a number of organisations that provide further information, support or advice that may help you live well at home. You may need to find the contact details of these organisations in your area. This section tells you where you should be able to find these details, and has space for you to write them down.

Age UK

0800 055 6112

www.ageuk.org.uk/about-us/local-partners

Local Age UKs provide a range of services to older people, including information and advice, home help, and IT and other training. You can find your local Age UK using the contact details above.

Local contact details:

DSDC (Dementia Services Development Centre)

www.dementia.stir.ac.uk

DSDC is an international centre providing resources including online guides and print publications on design solutions for people living with dementia.



Local council

www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council

The local council social services department can arrange community support and social care to help you live as independently as possible.

Local contact details:

Fire and rescue service

www.cfoa.org.uk/frs

This fire and rescue service can provide free home safety visits. They offer advice about how to make your home safer, as well as fitting smoke alarms and planning escape routes.

Local contact details:

GP

www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp

The GP can refer you to other health and social care professionals who may be able to help you live well at home, for example an occupational therapist.

Local contact details:



TrustMark

0333 555 1234

www.trustmark.org.uk

TrustMark is a scheme for trades in and around the home. You can search for a local tradesperson on their website.

Local contact details:

Home Improvement Agencies

0300 124 0315

www.findmyhia.org.uk

Home Improvement Agencies are local organisations dedicated to helping older people, people with disabilities and vulnerable people to live in safety and with dignity in their own homes.

Local contact details:



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For advice and support call
Alzheimer's Society on **0333 150 3456**

Our information is based on evidence and need, and is regularly updated using quality-controlled processes. It is reviewed by experts in health and social care and people affected by dementia.

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To give feedback on this publication, or for a list of sources, contact publications@alzheimers.org.uk

This booklet can be downloaded from our website at alzheimers.org.uk/dementiafriendlyhome

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Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading dementia charity. We provide information and support, improve care, fund research, and create lasting change for people affected by dementia.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit **alzheimers.org.uk** or call the **Alzheimer's Society support line** on **0333 150 3456**. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)



People affected by dementia need our support more than ever. With your help we can continue to provide the vital services, information and advice they need. To make a single or monthly donation, please call us on **0330 333 0804** or go to **alzheimers.org.uk/donate**



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