

Adapting your home

The physical environment can have a major impact on a person living with dementia. This help sheet provides information for families and carers on how to create a dementia-friendly environment that maximises the wellbeing of people living with dementia at home and increases their participation in activities.

A dementia-friendly environment

Research has found that the environment can have a positive or negative effect on a person with dementia and can help a person with dementia ‘hold on to their world by maintaining ties with familiar and comfortable surroundings’.

A dementia-friendly environment is one that promotes independence and supports wellbeing. It also:

- Draws on familiar surroundings
- Allows for easy access and orientation within the person’s home environment
- Provides support for doing things the person enjoys
- Provides support for participation in daily activities
- Provides aids to support safety, security and independence

Factors to consider for the person

Before discussing making changes in the home with the person, think about some of these things:

- What physical or thinking changes is the person experiencing?
For example, difficulty finding familiar items around the home.
- How can I help the person continue to feel comfortable and relaxed at home?
- How can I help the person continue doing things they enjoy at home?

- What can I do to help the person continue to feel valued and included in daily life?
- When is the best time of day to discuss making these changes in the home?
- What aids, cues or prompts such as clocks, signs or a message board may help the person manage daily tasks?

How to improve lighting

- Replace current globes with brighter globes to support good lighting within the home
- Open curtains/blinds fully to maximise the daylight within individual rooms
- Position seating for reading or hobby activities to take advantage of sunlight
- Consider using additional lighting such as floor or table lamps when performing tasks such as reading
- Consider using sensor lighting, which can reduce the risk of falls at night

Lounge room

- Create an opportunity for a quiet space to sit, relax or read
- Ensure opportunities are available to perform meaningful activities or favourite hobbies or pastimes.
- Place personal photos and items around the room to provide pleasant memories and opportunities for reminiscence
- Use different textures and colours in living rooms to provide sensory engagement e.g. knitted rugs, soft cushions
- Reduce clutter and remove potential hazards such as loose electrical cords or rugs, and provide storage for items to ensure sufficient space to move around
- Use contrasting colours for floors, walls and furnishings for visual identification

Kitchen

- Ensure there is sufficient room and lighting (overhead lighting and under cupboard lighting) to perform tasks in the kitchen
- Place regularly used items in the line of sight and group common items together
- Use labels and clear canisters to help locate items
- If necessary, use labels on cupboards or replace some solid doors with see-through ones to easily view items.
- Replace appliances that are not working with ones similar of design to support familiarity
- Use flood detectors, monitors and thermostat controls to reduce hazards or risks
- Utilise whiteboards and calendar clocks for orientation and important reminders
- Use taps that are familiar and easy to use

Dining room

- Consider using contrasting colours for table settings – place mats, plates, table cloth and glassware to improve the visibility of each item
- Ensure that there is adequate lighting during meal times such as using overhead lighting, side lamps and wall lighting or opening curtains
- Keep table settings simple and select suitable background music to create a pleasant atmosphere promoting open communication
- Ensure that crockery is simple and not distracting – patterns can be confusing and can make it difficult for the person to distinguish between the crockery and the food
- Consider adaptive cutlery and crockery, which can assist some people during meal times

Bedroom

- Ensure that there is adequate lighting; for example, sensor lighting can reduce the risk of falls at night time
- Use block out curtains or blinds to regulate sleeping patterns and stop shadows appearing on the window from outside trees and shrubs
- Remove clutter within the bedroom to ensure clear pathways, e.g. chairs, tables, clothes, shoes, rugs
- If necessary, use labels to identify items in drawers and cupboards in the bedroom
- Display a selection of daily clothing and shoes on a stand or a section of the wardrobe for easy access, as a way of promoting decision making and supporting independence

Bathroom

- Consider warmer colour tones for floors and walls and ensure that the room temperature is comfortable when using the bathroom
- Place regularly used items in a group within the line of sight and at a height that is accessible
- Use anti-flood devices, devices for releasing excessive water in bath, floor and fall detectors, and ensure that drainage holes are clear to reduce risks
- Use taps that are familiar and easy to use, and install thermostat or hot water cut off devices to regulate and monitor hot water temperature
- Use colour contrast to highlight items such as bath rails, door handles and toilet seats
- Consider covering or removing mirrors. Some people lose the ability to differentiate between what they see in the mirror (themselves or you) and reality
- Use devices for releasing excessive water in bath, floor and fall detectors

Garden

- Ensure safe and clear pathways within the garden by considering overhanging branches, plants with thorns, moss, mould, uneven or broken pavers or loose gravel
- Use clearly defined pathways around the garden that do not lead to dead ends
- Make careful selection of plants to avoid varieties that are poisonous when in contact with the skin
- Ensure there are shaded places to sit and relax in and look at the garden from either inside or outside the house.
- Create an opportunity to grow a vegetable or herb garden
- Use water features to add an extra sensory dimension ensuring it is clearly and safely delineated

Further information

For further information on creating a dementia enabling environment, please visit the Alzheimer's WA website enablingenvironments.com.au

References

1. Cohen, U., and Weisman, G. (1988). *Environments for people with dementia: Design guide*. Washington, DC: Health Facilities Research Program of the American Institute of Architects and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture.

Further Information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**