

# How can supportive aids help?

This help sheet explains how supportive aids can be used to assist people living with dementia by supporting their independence, reducing the risk of dangerous situations occurring, helping them maintain a sense of well-being and staying at home longer.

## What are supportive aids?

Sometimes called ‘assistive technology’ it refers to any device or system that assists an individual to perform a task that they would otherwise be unable to do, or increases the ease with which the task can be performed<sup>1</sup>.

Supportive aids range from very simple equipment, such as calendar clocks and touch lamps, to high tech solutions such as satellite positioning systems to help find someone who has become lost.

## What are the benefits?

Supportive aids can help by:

- Reducing the risk of accidents in and around the home
- Supporting independence and choice for the person with dementia and those around them
- Reducing premature entry into residential and hospital care
- Reducing the stress for carers, improving their quality of life and that of the person with dementia

## **Are supportive aids right for you?**

With any form of support or care, there are a number of considerations to make when deciding whether an item or aid is suitable for you.

Ideally, the person living with dementia is involved in the decision making process and consents to use the supportive aid. It's vital that cost, accessibility, appropriateness and ease of use are considered.

The need for familiarity is important, so it's important to only change the things that need changing.

## **Prompts and reminders**

There are a range of devices that can provide visual, verbal and auditory cues for people living with dementia. They may provide assistance in the following areas:

### **Medication reminders and dispensers**

These assist people living with dementia to take their medication correctly. They range from dosette boxes providing simple flip pill boxes labelled with time and/or day of the week, to automatic pill dispensers which have auditory and visual prompts, and Webster-packs available from pharmacies.

### **Orientation to date and time**

These can assist people living with dementia who find it difficult to know what is the time or day of the week. They range from orientation clocks which display the day, date and time, to clocks that display day and night.

### **Orientation signs and notices**

A variety of visual aids, signs or pictures can help a person to find items or rooms in the home or prompt them to remember events or appointments.

### **Memory joggers**

These enable an audio message to be recorded which is activated at set times of the day. For example the message may say, "It's 3 o'clock, time to take your pill". Single or multiple messages can be recorded with a clock timer set.

### **Item finders**

These are devices with one part attached to important items such as keys, wallets/purses, glasses, and the second part is a small hand held remote which when pressed will assist in locating any of these misplaced items.

Please also see our enabling environments website for additional information on orientation signs [enablingenvironments.com.au/orientation-and-wayfinding.html](https://enablingenvironments.com.au/orientation-and-wayfinding.html)

## **Sensory and therapeutic intervention**

### **Sensory and therapeutic supports**

As we interact with the world we use many senses (sight, sound, taste, touch and smell). It is possible to provide an individual with time and space to enjoy their environment at their own pace and free from the expectations of others. This can be done in the home, in an outdoor garden setting or in a specially designed room at home or in a residential facility.

Interesting sights, sounds, textures, smells and tastes provide ways for people with dementia to experience the world. Sensory simulation can also improve thinking skills because it can help people with dementia maintain an interest in their environment.

Studies have shown that appropriate sensory stimulation can help maintain functional abilities, improve memory, and increase verbalisation<sup>2</sup>. However it is also suggested that negative consequences can occur when the environment is over stimulating<sup>3</sup>.

Other supportive aids which can be introduced into the environment and provide sensory stimulation for people living with dementia range from therapeutic dolls or mechanical pets to sensory cushions. These can be introduced into daily living activities as the condition progresses.

## Communication

The way we communicate with others ultimately determines the quality of our lives. As the condition progresses, a person living with dementia can experience a gradual decrease in the ability to communicate and express themselves. Supportive aids can enable people living with dementia to communicate with others, enabling them to make their choices known to others. Examples of such devices include the ‘talking photo album’ and the CommunicAid App and kit.

### CommunicAid kit

A simple, user-friendly Communication Aid has been developed for people with expressive language difficulties and is available in English, Greek and Italian. An adaptable version (on CD) for other languages is also available. The kit contains resources based on sets of photos, line illustrations, statements of wishes (such as “I want to go..”) and items needed in everyday life. Using these will enable a person with dementia to indicate their choices and communicate their feelings. The kit is available from Alzheimer’s WA: [alzheimerswa.org.au](http://alzheimerswa.org.au)

## Safety

Supportive aids can improve safety within the home. For example, you may use automatic night lights or sensor lights, automatic devices to shut off power or gas for the stove, devices for releasing excessive water in bath, floor and fall detectors. There are also a range of door and window sensors/monitors that are useful for monitoring external doors and windows during the day or night. In addition, there are various alerts to monitor external gates in outdoor areas.

## Monitoring system

Supportive aids such as monitoring systems can help people living with dementia by reducing the risk of accidents in and around the home, reducing premature entry into residential and hospital care, and reducing the stress on carers and that of the person living with dementia.

## Every day living

There are devices such as automatic safety irons, one touch radios and bathing aids or small modifications to the home that can be used to improve activities of daily living for a person living with dementia.

## Further information

For further information on creating a dementia enabling environment, please visit the Alzheimer's WA website [enablingenvironments.com.au](http://enablingenvironments.com.au)

### References

1. Cowan, D. and Turner-Smith, A. (1999). 'The role of assistive technology in alternative models of care for older people' in Tinker, A. and et al (eds) Royal Commission on Long Term Care (Research Volume 2), London, The Stationery Office.
2. Witucki, J. and Twibell, R.S. (1997). The effect of sensory stimulation activities on the psychological well-being of patients with advanced Alzheimer's disease. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*, 12(1),10-15.
3. Hall, G.R & Buckwalter, K.C (1987). Progressively lowered stress threshold: A conceptual model for care of adults with Alzheimer's disease. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 1, 399-406.

## 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](http://dementia.org.au)



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