

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'¹.

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

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.

- 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 Alzheimer's Australia's website enablingenvironments.com.au

FURTHER INFORMATION

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



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