

Making your home safe & dementia friendly

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Life can be very confusing for people with dementia. Everyday objects in the home that we take for granted, such as photographs, mirrors, rugs, patterned wallpaper, pet food and cleaning items can become areas of worry and actually hazardous to someone with dementia.

This guide offers information on why these changes occur and some practical advice on how to make home a safe, comfortable, reassuring and dementia-friendly haven.



If you are caring at home for someone with dementia, it is important to make the home as safe, reassuring and 'dementia-friendly' as possible.

Before you start, it helps to understand more about how a person with dementia might be experiencing things.

Dementia causes changes in the brain which affect the way that people process information, so some normal aspects of the home can become difficult to understand or even threatening. For example, too many ornaments or busy patterns on wallpaper and carpets can be confusing, dark rugs can appear as holes in the floor while reflections can be upsetting, as often someone with dementia does not know the person in the mirror.

As dementia also weakens the senses, such as sensitivity to temperature, usual daily tasks like making a cup of tea may become difficult and even hazardous.

To making your home dementia friendly, start by taking a tour around it, beginning with the outside and working your way inside, so you cover the entire property.

The layout of their home can make a big difference to someone with dementia. The NHS and the Alzheimer's Society both offer useful advice on how to make the home safe and reassuring to someone with dementia.

It is often best not to make sudden, big alterations to the home of someone with dementia, as the change itself can be confusing and unsettling, but there are many small adjustments you can make to help someone's home be their safe haven.

Lighting

People with dementia benefit from good lighting, as it reduces confusion and the risk of falls. Dementia can cause people to see shadows or dark shapes as holes or threats, so try to ensure that there is as much natural daylight as possible, with sympathetic, non-glaring lighting for the evenings and sensor night lights if they need to move around at night.

Flooring

Rugs can confuse people with dementia into thinking that they are objects to be stepped over, while shiny floors may appear wet. Rugs in a single bright colour can be helpful to signal doorways. Make sure they are flat, rubber backed and non-slip, to reduce the risk of tripping.

Colours

Dementia can affect the way in which people perceive differences between colours, so try to choose contrasting colours for the likes of

doors, bannisters or hand rails, crockery and table cloths. This helps people distinguish between them. As patterns and stripes can be disorientating, it is best to opt for plain colours.

Mirrors

These can be unsettling because a person with dementia may not be able to recognise themselves, or they might perceive their reflection as a threat. If you think this is a problem, it is best to remove mirrors, closing curtains at night to avoid any reflections in the glass.

Finding things

Minimalism works best for people with dementia. So reducing confusing clutter and choosing things in bright, plain contrasting colours will make it easier to find those you use regularly. Try to keep essential items such as keys in the same place

Visual clues are often useful – pictures on cupboards show what is kept inside or you can store food in clear plastic containers. Transparent fronts on cupboards and wardrobes, or simply removing the doors, also helps you to see more easily what is inside.

Danger zones

You will also need to minimise hazards in areas such as kitchens, garages and workshops as dementia can cause changes to people's perception of what is good to eat or drink, and they may mistakenly eat pet food, for example, or drink cleaning fluids.

- Check the fridge and store cupboard regularly for expired or mouldy food, keeping raw foods safely out of the way.
- If you have a pet give them a time limit to eat their meal and quickly remove any leftovers.
- Keep cleaning fluids or other liquids (that can be mistaken for fruit juice) out of reach, or safely locked away.
- Reducing the temperature of your hot water will help to avoid scalds from the tap.
- Lock away any sharp or potentially dangerous objects or kitchen appliances.

For more tips on adapting the home for someone with dementia, click below:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/home-environment

www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/making-your-home-dementia-friendly

Getting a needs assessment

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To get any adjustments done to make the house safer and more dementia friendly, you will first need to get a needs assessment carried out by your local council.

For more information about how to ask for a needs assessment, please see our leaflet, *'Living with dementia'* at:

www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/library

Also visit:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/help-from-social-services-and-charities/getting-a-needs-assessment



This leaflet is part of a series designed to help people understand more about dementia – the different types, getting and living with a diagnosis, experiencing a full life with dementia and how to find the best dementia care for you or a loved one.

Visit our resource library for our other leaflets:
www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/library

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