

Adapting your home

This help sheet provides information on how to adapt a home to be dementia-friendly. It explains how a dementia-friendly home can help a person living with dementia feel safe and supported.

A dementia-friendly environment

Dementia can change a person's perception of their home environment. The condition can also impact their abilities to maintain daily routines and activities.

A dementia-friendly home environment supports someone to:

- live well at home
- maintain independence
- carry out daily tasks
- feel safe and secure in a familiar place
- participate in enjoyable activities.

Factors to consider

If you are living with dementia, you can make changes in your home with the right advice, supports and practical modifications. Before you make any changes, consider the impact dementia may be having on your wellbeing.

- How is dementia affecting your physical and thinking abilities?
- Are you finding it hard to find familiar things around your home?
- Is your ability to move around safely and independently being affected by the room layout, furniture or fixtures?
- What changes could be made to make you feel more comfortable and relaxed at home?
- What aids, cues or prompts (such as clocks, signs or a message board) may help you remember daily tasks and when to do them?

You could write down some notes independently or ask a family member or friend for advice and help to adapt your home.

You could plan to make changes in stages, to support you to build familiarity with changes to fixtures and furnishings.

Below are some practical tips to make the home environment more enabling for you.

Lighting

- Keep areas well-lit and make best use of natural light to help with general wellbeing.
- Open curtains and blinds fully to maximise daylight.
- Be aware of light reflecting on shiny surfaces: it can be distracting and cause confusion.
- Replace current globes with brighter ones.
- Arrange seating for reading, eating or hobby activities, taking advantage of sunlight.
- Consider additional lighting (such as table lamps) for reading or detailed activities.
- Consider sensor lighting, which can reduce the risk of falls at night.

Safety

- Remove trip hazards such as loose electrical cords or rugs, to allow sufficient space to move around.
- Remove clutter such as chairs, tables, clothes, shoes and rugs to ensure clear pathways.
- Install a smoke alarm.
- Install thermostat or hot water cut off devices to regulate and monitor hot water temperature.
- Ensure drainage holes are clear and use anti-flood devices, such as for releasing excessive water in the bath.
- Use floor and fall detectors

General decor

- Use large light switches that contrast with the wall.
- Have plain, non-patterned carpet or tiles.

- Use contrasting colours for floors, walls and furnishings, to help identify them.
- Consider updating patterned furnishings to a plain colour.
- Place frequently used items in the line of sight and at an accessible height.
- Group common items together. For example, group tea, coffee, sugar, mugs in the kitchen. Group a toothbrush, toothpaste, mouthwash, dental floss in the bathroom.
- Make rooms homely, with family furniture, photos, books and memorabilia.
- Use whiteboards and calendar clocks for orientation and important reminders.

Lounge room

- Arrange a quiet space to sit, relax or read with a sturdy table and raised comfortable chair that is easy to stand up from and sit in.
- Have games, jigsaw puzzles and photo albums available and set up areas for meaningful activities, favourite hobbies or pastimes.
- Use different textures and colours for sensory engagement, such as knitted rugs and soft cushions.

Kitchen

- Make the kitchen functional. Consider creating areas for cooking, preparation, washing, supplies and storage.
- Ensure there is sufficient bench space and lighting (such as overhead lighting and under-cupboard lighting) to perform tasks.
- Use transparent canisters and label them.
- Use labels on cupboards or replace solid doors with transparent ones, to view items easily.
- When replacing appliances, get new ones with a similar design so they are familiar.
- Use taps that are familiar and easy to use.

Dining room

- Turn on lights or open curtains during mealtimes.
- Keep table settings simple.
- Consider using contrasting colours for items in table settings (such as placemats, plates, tablecloths and glassware) to help identify them.
- Ensure plates are plain: it can be difficult to distinguish between a pattern on a plate and the food.
- Where needed, consider specialised cutlery and tableware developed to assist people during mealtimes.

Bedroom

- Use block-out curtains or blinds to regulate sleeping patterns and prevent shadows on windows from trees and shrubs outside.
- If helpful, use labels to identify items in drawers and cupboards.
- Consider using contrasting top and bottom bed sheets, to assist with getting into bed.
- Ask a family member or friend to display a selection of daily clothing and shoes on a stand or a section of the wardrobe, to help decision-making and support independence.

Bathroom

- Consider warmer colour tones for floors and walls
- Use contrasting colours to highlight items such as bath rails, doorhandles and toilet seats.
- Ensure the room temperature is comfortable.
- Use taps that are familiar and easy to use.
- Consider covering or removing mirrors. Dementia can cause some people to not recognise their reflection in the mirror or understand what a reflection is.

Garden

Use clearly defined paths around the garden that do not lead to dead ends. Ensure pathways are kept clear of:

- overhanging branches
- plants with thorns
- moss
- mould
- uneven or broken pavers
- loose gravel.

Other points to consider:

- Review garden plants carefully and remove varieties that are poisonous to the touch.
- Ensure there are shaded places to sit and relax and enjoy the garden from either inside or outside the house.
- Create a vegetable or herb garden.

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia-Friendly Home App:
Visit: dementia.org.au/resources/dementia-friendly-home-app
- Dementia Australia education: How dementia-friendly is your home?
Visit: dementia.org.au/education
- Living with dementia: home life
Visit: discrimination.dementia.org.au/home-life
- Dementia Australia library:
Visit: dementia.org.au/library

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au