

MAKING DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CHANGES AROUND THE HOME

The wonderful thing about a dementia friendly home is that it will support the wellbeing and comfort of all who live in it, enabling the home to run smoothly and its inhabitants to function at their optimal level. The aim of a dementia friendly environment is to make everyday activities easier, enabling people with dementia stay as independent as possible for as long as possible. Often minor changes can have a major impact. Let's look at what can be done.

1. Deal with Clutter

We are naturally either “pilers” or “filers”. We either pile things up or we put things away so that we can find them again. It is more helpful for someone living with dementia, if items are put in their usual place, enabling us to find them with ease. This might mean that you need to be more intentional about putting things away and focusing on the objects your person with dementia uses regularly to help them find what they need easily, but it does work well to reduce frustration.

2. Make the Most of Contrasting Colours and Minimising Patterns

Colours can be extremely helpful in enabling someone with dementia to distinguish objects. E.g., Contrasting colours between plates and tableware is helpful to distinguish food on a plate and contrasting colours between walls and floors facilitates safer walking.

Highly patterned objects can create confusion, making useful objects and furniture harder to identify. When replacing patterned items of furniture or objects, consider replacing them with solid-coloured items.

3. Leave Doors Open as Much as Possible.

A person living with dementia might not always remember where specific rooms in their house are. If possible, it may be helpful to leave the interior doors open as much as possible. This provides better visual cues regarding where specific rooms are, making it easier to find their way about the house. If keeping the door open isn't an option and they are better closed, a simple 1 word or picture sign can help to identify a certain room. Using a contrasting colour to paint the door may also be useful, e.g., a toilet door is easier to find if it is painted in a contrasting colour.

4. Thinking About the Utility Rooms.

The Kitchen

- Keep larger kitchen appliances that are used often, in an easily visible and accessible place.
- Label drawers and cupboards that house smaller kitchen items. If you are happy to make a more permanent change, you could take the cupboard doors off and have open shelves or replace the doors for glass ones. This will give a visual cue as to where to find things.
- Conversely, there may be things in the kitchen that you don't want your person with dementia to find
 - A good example of this would be if your person with dementia is continually wanting to feed the pet. It may be wise to remove pet food out of sight.
- Use adapted utensils, dishware, or drinkware to help a person remain independent.
- At mealtimes it is helpful to sit at the table without the distraction of TV or radio.

The Bathroom

- Consider adding a toilet seat in a contrasting colour, White toilet seats tend to blend in with the toilet and its surroundings.
- A raised toilet seat can help people to sit and stand independently.
- Labelled hot and cold taps help to minimise confusion.

5. Lighting

- Aim to have a home that is filled with as much bright, even, and natural light as possible.
- Avoid shiny surfaces that can create glare. Use sheer curtains to minimise glare and use brighter lighting for darker areas to minimise shadows.
- Open curtains and blinds. It may be necessary to cut back shrubbery if it obscures light from the window.
- It may be necessary to make large areas of glass more visible by using decals on shower doors or sliding doors.
- It is particularly important to have good lighting on the stairs and in the toilet.
- Light switches need to be easy to distinguish and access.
- Automatic light sensors may be helpful for people getting up in the night.
- It is helpful, for maintaining good diurnal patterns, to ensure that the bedroom can be darkened at night.

6. Keeping Floors Safe

- If possible, avoid mats on the floors. Some people with dementia can become confused and think they need to step over mats, increasing the risk of trips or falls.
- Shiny or reflective flooring may be perceived as wet. A person with dementia may struggle to walk over it.
- Dark colours on patterned floors may be perceived as holes, so it is best to avoid floor coverings with large dark patterns.
- Contrasting walls and floors help a person with dementia to perceive different areas more easily.

Gardens and Outside Spaces

- Maintain walking surfaces well. A flat surface will do much to prevent trips or falls.
- If your person with dementia is inclined to wander away from your premises, it will be necessary to ensure the area is safely secure.
- Raised garden beds help enable a person with limited mobility continue to enjoy working in their garden.
- Sheltered seating will enable a person to enjoy being outside for longer periods of time. It is a lovely idea to utilise bird feeders and bug or bee houses to attract birds and insects into the garden to provide another element of interest.
- Adequate lighting for pathways, drives and doorways is essential to minimise trips or falls.
- Think about planting plants that are fragrant and visually distinguishable to help engage the senses.

Many of these suggestions do not involve huge expense or require major change around the house. In fact, many changes can be made when you need to replace items around the home. They will, however, minimise frustration and help all those who live in your home experience comfort and operate at their optimal level.

Happy Home making!

Acknowledgements

- [13 Ways to Create a Dementia Friendly Environment at Home](#)
- [NHS Dementia Home Environment Conditions](#)
- Dementia Friendly Environment Tips
- [Memory Matters Shop](#)

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