

Making the home safe and comfortable for a person with dementia



Dementia can have a significant impact on how a person functions within their home. Memory issues or problems recognising and interpreting their environment could cause confusion and frustration, as well as possible safety issues.

Many people with dementia – especially older people – also have vision or hearing impairments, mobility problems or other health conditions that might make the home harder to manage.

To help the person with dementia maintain their independence and quality of life and remain in their home for longer, it is important to make their environment as safe, comfortable and easy to manage as possible. Changes to the home do not have to be difficult or expensive – often, even small adjustments can make a difference.

Adapting the home for a person with dementia

The best way to identify possible hazards around the home is to take a room-by-room tour looking out for areas of risk and adaptations you could make. Try to involve the person in any changes you are making. If this is not possible, always make sure decisions are taken in their best interests.

Outside the home

Keeping the outside of the home looking consistent can help the person with dementia recognise where they are and reduce confusion, so avoid making any significant changes to the exterior, such as painting the door a different colour or cutting down trees or shrubs. A large door number could help the person recognise their home, and you could also consider putting an easily identifiable object like a garden ornament outside.

If the person with dementia is prone to trips or falls, you could fit a sturdy handrail to steps, or have them converted to a ramp. Ensure there is proper lighting in case they are coming or going in the dark – a



motion sensor light means they will not have to remember to turn it on or off.

You may like to put a sticker on the door or letterbox requesting no junk mail or cold calls, or join a Neighbourhood Watch group and display its sticker – please see Sources of support on p19 for details.

A video doorbell can be a useful safety measure to monitor who is coming and going from the property. You could also fit a key safe with a combination code so that family members, carers or emergency services can access the property if the person with dementia cannot open the door – do not leave spare keys in an obvious place like under a doormat.

The hallway

- Keep the hall uncluttered so it is easy to get through the front door
- Hang a clear, easy-to-read clock near the door, displaying the time, day and date, to help the person tell if it is time to go out
- Keep keys in a consistent place so they are easy to find – but make sure they are not visible from the outside. A drawer in a hallway table is ideal
- Use gripper tape to secure doormats or carpet runners to reduce the risk of falls, or remove them completely
- Fit a door alarm if the person with dementia is likely to leave the home alone when it is unsafe for them to do so – this can give family members who live with the person peace of mind, especially overnight

The kitchen

The kitchen can be a confusing and potentially dangerous place for a person with dementia. Making sure that everything they may need is easy to use, easily identifiable and within reach can make it as safe and manageable as possible.

- Keep items that the person uses frequently, like mugs, tea/coffee and spoons, on the worktop
- Consider replacing solid cupboard doors with clear doors so that the contents are easy to see
- If you cannot do this, you could stick a simple sign or photograph of the cupboard's contents to the door to help the person remember what is inside; an alternative is to remove cupboard doors, but be aware of the risk of things falling out



- Clearly label hot and cold taps, either by writing the words on waterproof (eg laminated) labels beside each tap or replacing them with taps marked 'hot' and 'cold'
- Regularly check the fridge and cupboards and throw out anything that is out of date
- Write simple instructions – perhaps with pictures – for commonly used kitchen equipment like the microwave and washing machine, and keep them next to the appliance
- If an appliance breaks, try to replace like-for-like so the person understands how to operate it
- Look into assistive products that help to maintain independence and safety, such as kettle tippers to make pouring easier, jar openers, modified chopping boards etc – please see Sources of support on p18 for information on living aids

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- Hang a whiteboard or calendar in a prominent place for reminders of important household activities, eg locking the doors at night, taking bins out, charging their phone

If you are using labels to help the person find their way around the kitchen and other places in the home, make sure they are clear, easy to understand, and at eye level. You can find printable images and signs online or buy signs from shops selling assistive living aids. Avoid introducing too many new labels at once as this could cause confusion – start with the things that will be the most useful to the person.

To reduce the risk of accident, injury and fire in the kitchen, you could:

- store all medicines, cleaning products, chemicals and objects like batteries out of reach in a locked cabinet or cupboard. Many household cleaning items like liquid washing capsules are brightly coloured and can be easily misconstrued as edible. Products should always be stored in their original containers with lids securely fastened – do not reuse old biscuit or chocolate tins for storage as this may make the person think the contents are edible
- hang an oven glove in an obvious place and remind the person to use it
- put items the person uses regularly, like saucepans and tinned food, in a bottom cupboard so they do not need to climb to get to them – items that are used less often, like kitchen scales, could be kept in higher cupboards
- replace pans with metal handles that may get hot with plastic-handled pans



- speak to your gas supplier about fitting a gas valve limiter to the cooker – these are usually free and prevent the gas being left on or switched on accidentally
- use a flood and scald prevention plug in the sink – if the tap is left on, these automatically drain the water once it gets to a certain depth. They also change colour if the water is too hot

The living room

The living room should be a place for relaxation, so make sure chairs are comfortable and supportive. Assistive furniture that rises, lowers and tilts to help the person stand up and sit down can be very useful, but may be expensive.

Putting up photos can act as a memory aid, encourage reminiscence and help the person stay grounded in time. Make sure they are meaningful, familiar and from a recognisable time – for example school photos or wedding portraits – and consider labelling them with people's names.

Decide on a consistent, easily accessible place such as a side table or armchair organiser for important items like the person's glasses,

purse/wallet, mobile phone, keys, medication etc. This will help prevent things being mislaid and avoid the person having to get up and down too often, especially if they are prone to falls.

If the person with dementia struggles to operate the television, you can buy simple universal remote controls with large, clearly labelled buttons. You could also put a brightly coloured sticker on the remote control and the same colour on the TV to show the person that they are connected to each other – you can do this on other remote controlled devices too.

Smart devices (such as Google, Alexa or Siri) can be very useful. For example, they can be programmed to perform tasks like turning lights on and off, play music, read audiobooks and give reminders. It is a good idea to introduce this technology in the early stages of dementia to give the person the best chance of mastering it – although younger people with dementia may already be very familiar with using these devices. Think about what sort of voice will be most suitable (for example, some people find a female voice more reassuring than a male one).

Some people with dementia experience ‘sundowning’ – a feeling of intense confusion and being in the wrong place which often occurs at dusk. Fitting heavy curtains and drawing them at the same time each day, and switching lights on before it gets dark, may help to ease the transition from day to night and reduce distress. Please see Sources of support on p18 for more information.

Electric fires or portable fan heaters could be accidentally left on or tripped over, so it is safest not to use them. Check that the central heating is set to a comfortable temperature (18-21°C suits most people), and if the person tends to get cold, leave a blanket within easy reach of their chair.



The bedroom

It is important for everyone to have a safe and relaxing place to sleep, with enough space to get into and out of bed, and get dressed and undressed.

- Try to reduce clutter in the bedroom to avoid falls, especially in the dark
- Some people with dementia can find choosing clothes from drawers or wardrobes difficult. You could consider laying out the person's outfit ready for the morning, and packing away certain clothes when the season changes to make it easier for them to pick appropriate outfits for the weather and time of year (eg putting summer clothes in the loft when autumn begins)

- A movement or bed sensor will let you know if the person gets out of bed so you can check on them and help them if you need to, giving you peace of mind
- If the person has continence issues, fit a waterproof mattress cover and ensure that any incontinence pads or pants are comfortable and will last the night. See Sources of support on p18 for our information on continence
- Choose bedding and nightwear that are comfortable and appropriate for the weather – if the person is too hot or cold, they are more likely to wake up
- Use a night light or a touch-operated bedside light that is easy to turn on if the person gets up during the night
- An easy-to-read clock on the bedside table or wall may help the person know when it is time to get up, and when to try to sleep

The bathroom

Using colour and contrast can make the bathroom safer and easier to navigate for the person with dementia. These tips may help:

- Stick a written sign or a picture of a toilet to the door to help the person locate the bathroom – you can also do this for other rooms, eg putting a picture of the bed on the bedroom door
- Leave the bathroom light on at night to help the person find their way
- Fit a toilet lid and seat in a different colour from the toilet itself so that it is easy to see, and leave the toilet lid up so they do not have to lift it
- Remove toilet and bathmats – these can be trip hazards and may look like a hole or other obstacle if the person has problems with visual perception



- Use a free-standing holder for toilet paper. These are easier to see than wall-mounted holders, and putting it right next to the toilet means the person does not have to stretch and potentially lose their balance, but be aware that they may be a trip hazard and are best avoided if the person is prone to falls
- Buy toilet paper that is a different colour from the holder, walls and floor
- Choose towels in a different colour from the wall so they stand out on the towel rail
- Install grab rails or handles at useful points around the bathroom such as in the bath/shower and next to the toilet
- A bath or shower seat may be useful if the person has mobility or balance problems
- Use flood and scald prevention plugs in the basin and bath

Walls and floors

Making changes to the walls and flooring may not be possible, but if you are redecorating, or if the person with dementia is moving to a new home, these are some things you could consider.

- Choose matt flooring and walls, as shiny surfaces may appear wet or slippery to a person with dementia
- Avoid patterned wallpaper, which can cause visual confusion
- Try to use one consistent style and colour of flooring throughout – changes in pattern or colour can look like an obstacle or step
- Avoid dark-coloured rugs, which could look like a hole in the floor
- If carpets or floor coverings are damaged, replace them promptly to prevent falls
- Paint walls a different colour from the floors
- Sticking coloured tape around doorframes, on the edge of steps and around light switches can make them stand out
- Ensure floors are completely dry after mopping to reduce the risk of slipping

Preventing falls

Many people with dementia are prone to falls. Here are some things you can do to reduce the risk throughout the home.

- Make sure there is no clutter on the floor, such as trailing wires, shoes and toys
- Remove rugs or ensure they are secured or stuck down
- Remove furniture with thin legs that could be tripped over
- Consider a personal fall alarm that the person can press to



summon help – your local authority can offer advice on ‘telecare’ services offering this in your area

- Ensure the person’s shoes and slippers are sturdy and fit properly – avoid backless slip-on styles
- Avoid trailing clothing like long dressing gowns or nightdresses
- Install sturdy bannisters or rails to support the person on the stairs and in places around the home and garden where they are most likely to fall
- Make sure the person attends their health, optician and hearing appointments to check for problems that may cause unsteadiness
- Remind the person not to rush or carry too much at once

Fire safety

- Fit smoke alarms throughout the home – there should be one in the hallway, landing, and every ‘habitable’ room (eg living, dining and bedrooms – but not bathrooms) and a heat sensor in the kitchen
- If possible, alarms should be mains powered rather than battery powered, and interlinked so that if one goes off, the rest do too
- Test alarms once a month, even if they are mains powered
- If the alarm is battery powered, batteries should be replaced every six months, even if they do not appear to be flat
- All smoke alarms should be replaced completely every 10 years
- Never remove batteries from an alarm (eg to silence it if it goes off while cooking) in case you forget to put them back
- Fit carbon monoxide detectors in every room with a fuel-burning appliance such as a gas boiler, gas fire, open fire or wood burner

Most fire services offer free home safety checks to identify risks, advise on fire safety and form an escape plan. They may also be able to fit free smoke alarms. Contact your local fire station for advice (do not call 999 for this).

Light and noise

A home that is well-lit during the day and dim and cosy at night can help keep the person with dementia safe and comfortable. You could try:

- opening curtains fully during the day
- removing net curtains or blinds to allow natural daylight in
- installing lightbulbs with a high wattage



- placing the person's favourite chair by a window so they get plenty of daylight and can watch what is going on outside
- using portable or plug-in night lights in hallways to help them see when it is dark
- fitting blackout curtains in the bedroom to help the person sleep – especially in the summer when mornings and evenings are lighter
- using timer plugs on lamps so they switch on and off at appropriate times

Noisy environments may cause agitation and distress in people affected by dementia and make it harder to concentrate and follow

conversations. Try to reduce unnecessary background noise, for example by switching off the TV and radio when they are not actively being used (although some people find it comforting to have favourite music or a radio station playing quietly – be guided by your knowledge of the person and what they have enjoyed in the past).

If the person lives in a busy environment with other people, especially children, try to set aside a quiet space where they can go if they are feeling overwhelmed, for example their bedroom.

Requesting a home assessment

A free home assessment from social services can identify what adaptations and equipment could help the person with dementia stay safe and comfortable at home. This is normally carried out by an occupational therapist (OT), who will ask questions about how the person is managing everyday tasks and walk with them around the home to see what they struggle with. Try to be as specific as possible so they can make an accurate assessment.

After the assessment, the OT will write a report detailing their recommendations. Small adaptations that cost under £1,000 should be paid for by the local council: for example grab rails, automatic outdoor lighting, or a ramp to access the home. Larger adaptations like fitting a stairlift or wet room are not usually paid for by the council, but the person may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant or a grant from Independence at Home.

For more information on home assessments and grants, see Sources of support on p19.



Occupational therapy

Occupational therapy aims to improve people's ability to carry out everyday tasks that they are finding difficult. OTs can help to identify daily living equipment and home adaptations that may be helpful, such as mobility aids, products that help with eating and drinking, and assistive technology.

OTs can also suggest ways to modify daily tasks to make them more manageable; help people develop new skills that enable them to carry out essential activities; and carry out home assessments.

You can request an occupational therapy assessment through the GP or local council. Alternatively, you can book a private occupational therapy appointment – please see Sources of support on p19 for more information.

Sources of support

To speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse about making the home safe and comfortable for a person with dementia or any other aspect of dementia, please call our Helpline on **0800 888 6678** (Monday to Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm) or email ➤ helpline@dementiauk.org

To book a phone or video call appointment with an Admiral Nurse, please visit ➤ dementiauk.org/book

Dementia UK resources

Caring from a distance

➤ dementiauk.org/caring-from-a-distance

Continence

➤ dementiauk.org/continence

Falls

➤ dementiauk.org/dementia-and-falls

Financial and legal sources of support

➤ dementiauk.org/financial-and-legal-sources-of-support

Finding help and support at home

➤ dementiauk.org/finding-help-assistance

Living aids and assistive technology

➤ dementiauk.org/living-aids-and-assistive-technology

Living alone with dementia

➤ dementiauk.org/living-alone-with-dementia

Sundowning

➤ dementiauk.org/sundowning

Other sources of support

Disabled Facilities Grant

➲ gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants

Disabled Living Foundation: impartial advice on daily living equipment and other aspects of independent living

➲ livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Fire Brigade home fire safety advice

➲ london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home

Home assessments

➲ nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/care-services-equipment-and-care-homes/home-adaptations

Independence at Home grants

➲ independenceathome.org.uk

Neighbourhood Watch

➲ ourwatch.org.uk

Occupational therapy

➲ nhs.uk/conditions/occupational-therapy/

Royal College of Occupational Therapists – find an occupational therapist

➲ rcot.co.uk/about-occupational-therapy/find-occupational-therapist

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

➲ rospa.com

**To speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse
about any aspect of dementia:**

Contact our Helpline:
0800 888 6678 or helpline@dementiauk.org

Book a virtual appointment:
dementiauk.org/book

**Our charity relies entirely on donations to fund our
life-changing work. If you would like to donate to help us
support more families:**

- Call **0300 365 5500**
- Visit **dementiauk.org/donate**
- Scan the QR code

Thank you.



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Publication date: October 2024. Review date: March 2026. © Dementia UK 2024

Dementia UK, 7th Floor, One Aldgate, London EC3N 1RE
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