



Keeping safe at home

Living with
dementia series





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Keeping safe at home

This booklet will be useful for people with dementia who want to remain living safely at home, and for friends and family members who are supporting them.

You may find you're having difficulties keeping safe. For example, you might sometimes forget to turn the lights or oven off, or find it harder to use stairs. By making some changes, you can stay safe in your home and enjoy your independence for longer.

You might need to think a little bit more about how you do some things. There may be equipment or technology you can get or buy to help you with specific problems.

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‘This lady had a retirement flat in a lovely area and knew all the people there – taking her away from that before she really needed to move would have been a great shame.’

Fire safety worker

This booklet is based on research, and the personal experiences of people with dementia and the people who support them (family, friends and care professionals).

Your GP or staff at the memory clinic or social services can also give advice on staying safe at home. They may refer you to an occupational therapist, who can help you to think about how to do some of the things around the house that you're finding difficult.

Alzheimer's Society has publications with more information on aspects of living safely at home that you may find useful. They contain more details on subjects covered here such as technology and changes to your home. These are booklet 819, **Making your home dementia friendly**, and factsheets 429, **Using equipment and making adaptations at home**, and 437, **Using technology to help with everyday life**. You can read, download or order these at alzheimers.org.uk/publications



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General tips

There are many different aspects to living safely at home. If you rent your home, your landlord, letting agent, local council or housing association should be able to help you make it safe. The following list is a good place to start:



Keep a list of emergency phone numbers near the telephone. You could also store important names and numbers on the phone, so you don't need to dial the numbers.



Keep other useful information to hand, including notes of where the following things are:

- stopcock (valve for turning off and on the cold water)
- gas and electricity meters
- fuses
- first aid box.



Get household appliances (such as your washing machine, fridge, boiler and oven) checked regularly. Keep paperwork relating to guarantees, warranties and maintenance such as servicing the boiler, and store them in a safe place. Whoever arranges this maintenance should remember to:

- use a qualified electrician for electrical appliances
- use a Gas Safe registered engineer for gas appliances.



If you have an open fire, have your chimneys swept once a year, or more often if you burn wood.



Get carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms fitted. Test these once a week.



Use timers for plugs, lights and heating systems to turn them on and off automatically.



Make sure there is good lighting throughout the home. Sensor lights can help ensure rooms and corridors are well-lit as you get close to them. These will turn off after some time if you leave the room.



Help to prevent falls by removing anything you could trip over, such as rugs and loose cables. Have grab rails fitted on the stairs and in the bathroom.



Use a personal alarm to alert other people if you fall.



For more on any of the equipment and technology mentioned here, see '**Technology**' on page 12.



Making changes to your home

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When you are living with dementia, it can help to make some changes to your home.

You might not need to, or be able to, make any big changes right now (such as building a more accessible shower), but it is worth thinking about what you might need in the future.

An occupational therapist can advise you on things such as:

- fitting grab rails
- adapting your bathroom
- installing ramps
- extra heating
- rearranging or reducing your furniture to create a safer living space.

If you do need to make major changes to your home, you may be able to get some funding from your local authority (council). The amount of funding they can provide will depend on what you need. If you are renting your home you will need to speak to your landlord or letting agent first. An occupational therapist can help you with the next steps to take.





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Keeping secure at home

When you are living with dementia, it is important to make sure you are safe and your home is secure.

The following tips may help:

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- Always be careful when answering the door to strangers. You don't have to open the door if you don't recognise the person.
- Think about having a chain and a peephole fitted on the inside of the front door. You can see the person and speak to them, without having to open the door fully to them.
- Consider installing a video doorbell to your front door. This will allow you to see, speak to and record the person outside without having to open the door. With some models you can also choose family members or friends who will also be able to monitor the front of your property using their smartphones. These systems require wifi (wireless internet).
- If you are expecting a visit from a tradesperson, try to arrange for someone you know to be at home with you. Keep a note of the tradesperson's name as well as the date and the reason they are coming. It may be useful to put a note on the inside of the front door as a reminder. Always ask to see the person's identification or ID before letting them in.

- Outdoor sensor lights can keep potential burglars away and provide peace of mind during the night.
- Consider fitting a burglar alarm, either yourself or using a professional alarm company. An alarm box fixed to the outside of your property can be an effective deterrent.
- If you have bicycles or motorbikes, keep them secured to your fence or a post outside your property, or store away in a locked shed or garage. If you have a car, make sure it is always locked and the windows are fully closed.
- Think about fitting new locks to your windows and doors, and make sure you know how to open and lock them quickly and easily. Your local police community support officer (PCSO) or Neighbourhood Watch can help, if you have one (see **‘Other useful organisations’ on page 33**).
- Consider having a telecare system fitted (see **‘Technology’ on page 12**).
- If you are going away, register with the Royal Mail Keepsafe service. For a fee, they will store your post at the nearest delivery office and deliver them when you return. This avoids a build-up of post at your front door, which can make your home look empty and more appealing to burglars.





Keeping safe from scams and fraud

Tricks, scams and fraud can take many forms. For example, someone trying to take money from you might try to convince you to buy a service or product that does not exist. Or they might charge you too much for something or try to get your personal information or bank details. They may pretend to be someone they are not to be let into your home to steal from you.

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The following tips may help:

- Stop unwanted junk mail and telephone calls by registering with the Mail Preference Service and Telephone Preference Service.
- If you receive a letter that you are not sure about, or which seems too good to be true – for example, claiming you have won a prize, but telling you to provide information or money to claim it – ask someone you trust to read it too.
- Consider putting a ‘no cold callers’ sign on your front door. You may be able to get one from your local authority (council). They are also available online.
- If you have an unexpected visitor, always ask to see the person’s identification or ID before letting them in. If you aren’t sure, call the company they are from to check they are who they say they are. Don’t be afraid to shut the front door while you do this. If visitors are genuine, they will understand.



Staying safe online

- Make sure your computer, laptop or tablet antivirus software is up to date and that your smartphone is kept updated.
- If you're buying something online, look for reviews about the company on different websites. Don't rely on reviews the company has put on its own website. Use a credit card if you have one, as most major credit card providers insure online purchases.
- Don't rely on seeing a padlock in the address bar of your web browser – these can be faked to make a website look secure.
- If you get an email from a strange email address, or one claiming to be from your bank, building society, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) or utility provider, don't click on any links. Doing this could infect your computer with a virus. If you receive a phone call, email or text asking for any personal information, you should not provide it. Instead, find the company's official website using an internet search engine such as Google, and contact them to find out whether they have contacted you.

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For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**



Technology

There are many ways that devices and technology (known as ‘assistive technology’) can help you at home.

Examples that you might want to think about include:

- automatic ‘shut-off’ devices that can stop the gas supply if the gas has been left on, or turn off a cooker if it’s been left on. Locking cooker valves are also available free of charge from all main gas suppliers. See ‘**Cooking**’ on page 24 for more information
- water isolation devices and flood detectors – see ‘**Water**’ on page 20 for more information
- lights that come on automatically when you move around. They can help to prevent trips and falls, especially if you get up in the night
- telephone blockers that can help stop nuisance calls.

Some of these items can be linked to telecare systems. For more information see ‘**Telecare**’ on page 14.

Some of these items are available from the Daily living aids section of Alzheimer’s Society’s online shop. Go to shop.alzheimers.org.uk/daily-living-aids





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Telecare

Telecare is the name for electronic systems or equipment that allow carers, friends or family members to care for a person remotely (from elsewhere). They can be used to help you to stay independent and reduce the risks you face when living with dementia, especially if you live alone.

One example of a telecare device is a community alarm. This is a pendant you wear around your neck or as a wristband. You can press it if you become worried or have an accident, such as a fall. An alarm will then be raised either at an alarm company or with someone you trust, so that they can help you. Many local authorities offer a community alarm service. You can check their website to apply for one in your area (see **'Other useful organisations'** on page 33).

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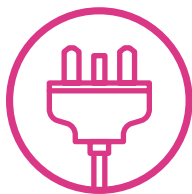
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'His system was linked to a front door alarm – so I was called if he left the door open at night and the operator spoke to him whilst I went round to check on him – it saved his bacon when he went walkabout.'

Relative of person with dementia

If possible, you should buy equipment from a company that belongs to a trade association, such as the British Healthcare Trades Association (see **'Other useful organisations' on page 33**). Its members are signed up to provide good standards of customer service. This can give you reassurance that you're buying the correct products at the right price. Equipment that conforms to European safety standards will have a CE kitemark. You may also see a BSI mark on some products. This means they have been tested and approved by the British Standards Institution.





Electricity, heating and water

It is very important that the energy systems, utilities and appliances in your home are well-maintained. Keep a record of who to contact if you have problems with these. This may be the energy provider – if you own your home – or your landlord or letting agent.

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‘If you move people, it can cause disorientation and deterioration. But if you can make their home a safe environment, they can hold onto their memories. It’s so much better for their quality of life.’

Homecare worker

Electricity

Keep safe by following these tips:

- Don't use appliances that have worn or damaged wiring, and never put more than one appliance on one plug.
- If you have lots of appliances and only one socket, use a strip extension lead (a long one with a line of sockets on it) instead of lots of adaptors.
- Consider using a cable tidy, which keeps all loose cables together so that they will not cause a trip hazard.
- It's safer to turn appliances off at the plug before you go to bed. There are timers for plugs available so that you don't have to remember to do this. You can also use timers on lights in hallways, for example, to ensure the area is well lit when you need it to be.
- If you are worried about forgetting to turn off appliances, consider buying appliances that switch off automatically. This will help you to stay independent and safe.

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Heating

If you have a gas or electric fire, make sure it is serviced regularly. For portable gas or electric heaters, think about fitting an extra guard, and keep them at a safe distance from furniture and curtains.

If you or those close to you have additional concerns about using gas or electrical appliances correctly, contact the gas or electricity company. You can ask them to put you on their Priority Service Register. This means you will be eligible for free regular safety checks, and will also be able to receive advice about safety measures. If you are not eligible for the Priority Service Register, speak with your utility company or landlord about other support they can provide.

Open fires can be dangerous. Never use one without a fire guard, and make sure your chimney is swept at least once a year. If you have other ways of keeping warm, try to limit how often you use an open fire.

Never air or dry clothes near a fire, even if it is well guarded. Use electric blankets correctly and have them checked regularly.

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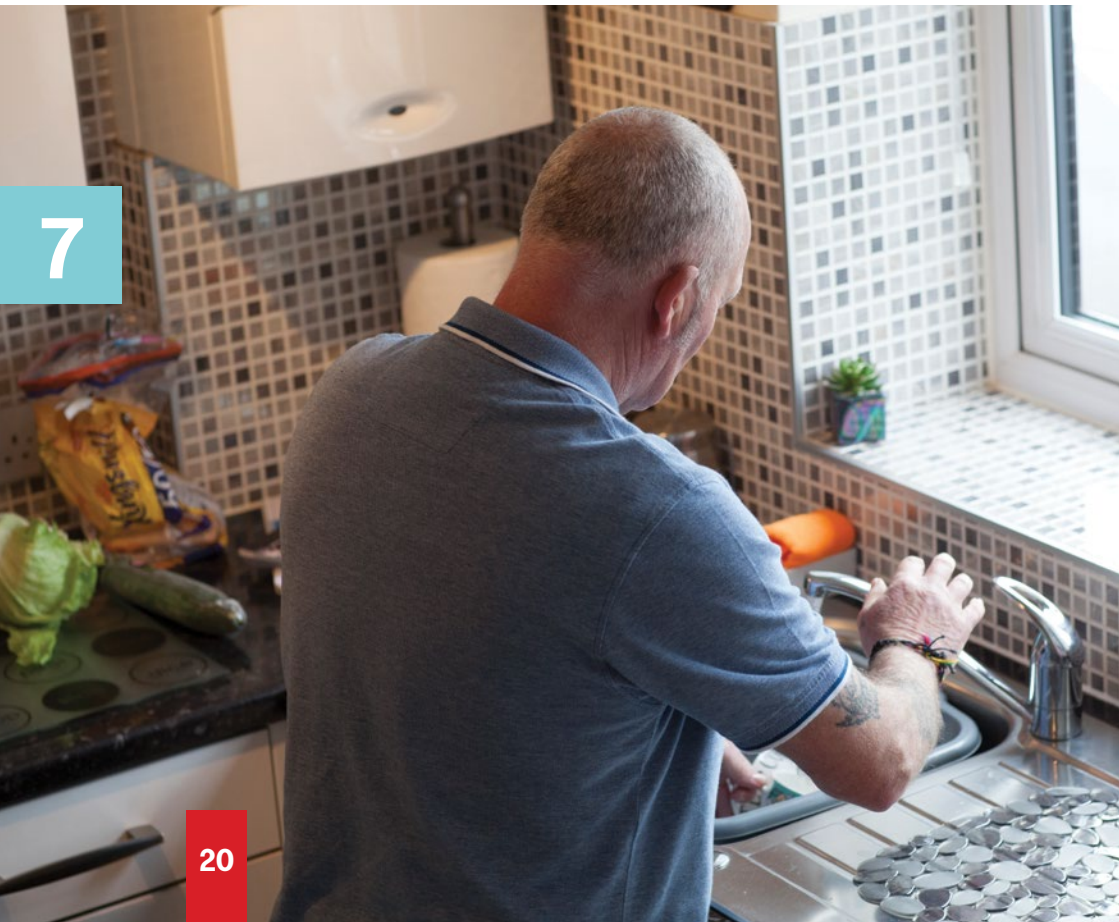
If you smell gas

- ✓ Turn the gas off at the meter.
- ✓ Open doors and windows.
- ✓ Call the gas emergency service on **0800 111 999**.
- ✗ Don't turn electric switches on or off.
- ✗ Don't use naked flames.
- ✗ Don't smoke.



Water

If you find you are forgetting to turn taps off, it is possible to fit taps that will stop automatically. For example, some taps will only work if you run your hands under them. Others turn off automatically after a set amount of water has flowed, or after a set time. Your local water company should be able to provide a catalogue of suitable taps. Sensors can also be fitted on skirting boards or floors in the kitchen or bathroom. If taps have been left running and cause a flood, the system will shut off the water and raise the alarm.



Bathrooms

Take particular care in the bathroom – remember the following tips:

- Never take portable heaters into the bathroom.
- Non-slip mats fitted in the bath can help to prevent accidents.
- If the water gets very hot, it may be possible to adjust the temperature on the boiler.
- Consider replacing taps and fittings with the style you find easiest to use, such as large handle taps clearly marked hot and cold.
- If you're having a bath don't run the water too hot – run it warm or put the cold water in first. This reduces the risk of being scolded. You can buy plugs that change colour when the water is a safe temperature.
- Pressure-activated plugs can be used to make sure the bath will not overflow if the water is left running too long.
- If you live alone, never lock the bathroom door.
- If you have a walk-in shower, consider using a plastic garden chair with a non-slip mat underneath. Or ask someone to fit a drop-down seat to the wall.
- Always store dangerous substances, including medicines, somewhere safe.

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Fire risk, cooking and kitchens

Making your home safe includes reducing the risk of fires, making your kitchen and appliances safe and taking care when preparing meals.

Fire protection

Fitting smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors can reduce the risk of fire in the home. Arrange a visit with the local fire and rescue service. They will come and visit you, free of charge, and can offer advice on fire safety. Some services will also fit free smoke detectors where required. See **'Other useful organisations' on page 33** for more information.

Also consider the following when thinking about fire safety in the home.

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- Make sure there are enough ashtrays around the house if you smoke.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Try to have, or buy, furniture that is fire resistant.
- Be extra careful when you're in the kitchen, especially when cooking with oil or fat.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.
- Keep a small domestic fire extinguisher within easy reach.







Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms give early warning of a fire, by detecting smoke and sounding an alarm. They are not needed in every room and are best fitted in hallways and at the top of stairs. Smoke alarms should not be in the kitchen and bathroom as heat and vapour from cooking and bathing can set them off unnecessarily. In these rooms heat alarms can be used instead, which detect unusually high or sudden changes in temperature. Do not fit too many alarms – a lot of noise can be confusing and disorientating. This could make it harder to get away from a fire.

Smoke alarms are run by batteries or by mains electricity. You should test the batteries in your alarms once a week by pressing the button until the alarm sounds. You should replace smoke alarms every ten years.

If there is a fire

-  Don't try to put it out.
-  Leave the house straightaway.
-  Call 999 from a neighbour's phone, mobile phone outside or from a phone box.
-  Don't go back in, not even for pets.

Cooking

It is important to check that your cooker is safe. For electric cookers, ask a qualified electrician to check it. For gas cookers, arrange a visit with a Gas Safe registered engineer.

If you have memory problems, you may worry that you will forget to turn off the oven or hob. 'Shut off' devices are available to stop the gas supply if you forget to turn off the cooker (see '**Technology**' on page 12).

You can also have a special gas tap fitted that friends and family can turn off when they leave your home, known as a 'lockable cooker valve'. It does mean that you won't be able to cook unless someone is with you, so you will lose some independence. This can be a difficult decision, but it might keep you safe. Discuss it with family and friends before going ahead. Your gas distributor will fit one for free if you request it – to find out who to contact see '**Other useful organisations**' on page 33.

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You might consider using a microwave instead of an oven. It can make cooking easier and can also be used to reheat food.



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Kitchen

Try to plan your kitchen so that things you use often are within easy reach. Also try to do the same for heavy things, such as flour and sugar or bulky equipment. The following tips will also help you to keep safe:

- Avoid climbing on chairs to reach cupboards. If you do need to reach high cabinets, use a small stepladder or stool with non-slip feet.
- Throw away food that has gone off or out of date. You could put a note on the fridge door as a reminder.
- If you have problems cutting food, try putting a non-slip mat under dishes or boards. This stops them from moving while preparing meals.
- Use timers when cooking to remind you that you have food in the oven or on the hob.
- You can buy knives with specially shaped handles, which are easier to control. Keep knives in good condition. Make sure you have a can opener that is easy to use.
- An electric kettle is better than a stove-top kettle as it automatically switches off once it has boiled. Don't overfill the kettle, and only boil as much water as you need. Consider using a kettle-tipper, which makes pouring safer and easier.

- Take extra care with boiling water and use mugs and cups that have a wide base.
- Label cupboards and objects with pictures and words so you can identify them easier.
- If you write yourself reminders or instructions, place them somewhere that can be easily seen, such as on the fridge.





Stairs and keeping steady

Falls on stairs and steps can cause injuries, so it is important to make them safe. If you rent your home you may need to speak to the landlord or letting agent about making any adjustments.

- If carpets or floor coverings are worn or damaged you should replace them.
- Try to make sure any banisters are sturdy.
- Make sure you can clearly see the edges of each step by using paint or 'nosing' (which is special stair edging).
- Consider fitting easy-grip handrails on the walls on both sides of the stairs.
- Keep stairs free from clutter, and try not to carry too much when using them.



Reducing risk of falls

You can reduce your risk of falling by doing strength or balance exercises twice a week. These include sitting, standing and walking exercises. Your GP could also refer you to a physiotherapist.



For more information, see factsheet 529, **Physical activity and exercise.**

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‘Last year I had grab rails fitted in the bathroom and a stair rail because I was beginning to notice occasional bouts of weakness in my husband’s arms and legs.’

Wife of a person with dementia

Home hazards tips

Check your home for potential hazards such as rugs, loose or worn carpets, furniture or objects lying around and note the following tips:

- ✓ Make sure your house is well lit, especially in the hall, landing and on the stairs.
- ✓ Keep a torch by the bed.
- ✓ Make sure electrical items are close to sockets to avoid trailing wires and flexes along the floor.
- ✓ If you have mobility or back problems, have a letter tray fitted on your front door to collect the post.
- ✓ Be careful when trying to get to something or somewhere that is out of reach. Make sure you have enough support and a secure footing.
- ✓ Stand up slowly when getting up from chairs or out of bed.

- ✓ Have regular eye tests.
- ✓ Avoid wearing clothes that are too long and may cause you to trip up.
- ✓ If the drugs you've been prescribed are making you feel dizzy, keep taking them but talk to your GP about it.
- ✓ Patterned carpets can cause perception problems for some people – think about replacing these carpets with a plain version. Avoid dark rugs which may look like obstacles or holes in the floor.
- ✓ Consider fitting grab rails, especially on the stairs and in the bathroom.



Getting help

Talk to your family and friends about what help they could offer.

They may be able to help you to stay safe by checking in on you now and again, or helping you out with things you find difficult – for example, getting things from high shelves or an attic or loft. You could also think about leaving a spare set of keys with someone close to you in case someone needs to get in the house.

You could have a key safe fitted to an outside wall instead. This contains a set of house keys and is opened by a code. You can give this code to trusted people (for example, carers who visit) so they can get in easily if you need them to.

For other kinds of help, see the **‘Other useful organisations’ section on the next page**. It lists organisations that can assist you with staying safe at home, including technology and equipment, different types of engineers, fire safety and Neighbourhood Watch.



Other useful organisations

Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors (APHC)

0121 711 5030 (main switchboard)

info@aphc.co.uk

www.aphc.co.uk

APHC is a professional body that can give you the details of a qualified plumber or heating engineer in your area.

British Healthcare Trades Association

020 7702 2141

info@bhta.com

www.bhta.com

The British Healthcare Trades Association is a membership association for companies that make equipment and assistive technology for people with health conditions.

Energy Networks Association

www.energynetworks.org/info/faqs/who-is-my-network-operator.html

This link allows you to find your local gas distributor, who will fit a lockable cooker valve for you if requested.



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Gas Safe Register

0800 408 5500

enquiries@gassaferegister.co.uk

www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Gas Safe Register is the official register of qualified and safe gas engineers.

GOV.UK (apply for a community alarm in your area)

www.gov.uk/apply-for-community-alarm

National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC)

0333 015 6625

enquiries@niceic.com

www.niceic.com

NICEIC is the professional body for the electrical industry. They can put you in touch with a registered electrician in your area.

Neighbourhood Watch

0116 402 6111

enquiries@ourwatch.org.uk

www.ourwatch.org.uk

Neighbourhood Watch is a social movement that aims to build safer communities. The website can give you details of the local Neighbourhood Watch scheme in your area.

Royal College of Occupational Therapists

020 3141 4600 (general enquiries)

hello@rcot.co.uk

www.rcot.co.uk

Royal College of Occupational Therapists is the professional body for occupational therapists. They can put you in touch with a qualified occupational therapist in your area.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

0121 248 2000

enquiries@rospa.com

www.rospa.com

ROSPA is a charity that works to reduce accidents by campaigning to change attitudes and legislation. They provide information on how to reduce accidents around the home.

UK Fire Service

www.fireservice.co.uk/safety

UK Fire service has information on fire safety in the home.



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Our information is based on evidence and need, and is regularly updated using quality-controlled processes. It is reviewed by experts in health and social care and people affected by dementia.

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To give feedback on this publication, or for a list of
sources, contact **publications@alzheimers.org.uk**

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We are Alzheimer's Society. We are a vital source of support and a powerful force for change for everyone affected by dementia. We provide help and hope.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit **alzheimers.org.uk** or call our **Dementia Connect support line** on **0333 150 3456**. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)



People affected by dementia need our support more than ever. With your help we can continue to provide the vital services, information and advice they need. To make a single or monthly donation, please call us on **0330 333 0804** or go to **alzheimers.org.uk/donate**



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