

# At home with dementia



Tips for making your home  
dementia friendly

# Information written with you in mind.

This information guide has been produced with the help of older people, carers and expert peer reviewers.

This guide has kindly been peer reviewed by Dementia UK.

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## Who this guide is for

**This guide is aimed at people living with dementia, but it can also be useful to their families and carers.**

If you're reading this for someone else, it helps you know what can help them stay as independent as possible for as long as possible. There's information specifically for carers and relatives on page 18.

### Next steps

It's a good idea to find out the number for your local council. They'll be able to provide a lot of the support and information mentioned in this guide.

**My local council phone number is:**

# What this guide is about

If you're living with dementia, there are some practical things you can do at home to make life easier.

Things might be getting a bit tricky, or you may be fine with how things are and want them to stay that way for as long as possible. A few changes at the right time can really help.

This guide takes you around the house, giving you some basic tips on how to adapt different areas to your circumstances. It is meant to be a toolbox of suggestions and tips – not all of them will work for everyone so choose what you think might work for you.

Some of the adaptations and practical changes could:

- help you to live safely and independently in your own home for as long as possible
- minimise problems which may arise in the future
- reassure family members or carers.

It may seem overwhelming to think of what the future could hold, but it's worth realising that while symptoms of dementia may change, there are things you can do to stay more independent for as long as you can.

As far as possible, the information in this guide applies throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Good to know

There's a list of useful organisations in the back of this guide (pages 21-23) that can help with further advice and support.

# Stairs and hallways

Stairs and hallways can cause real issues and increase the risk of a fall. Here are some tips to help keep you safe:

- Rugs and mats at the top or bottom of the stairs are a trip hazard, so it's a good idea to move them out of the way.
- Getting up and down steps can be tricky. Something to mark the edge of each step, such as paint or anti-slip tape, can really help you judge their depth and feel more confident when getting around. But do make sure any tape is stuck down well.
- Sometimes the threshold between rooms can look like a step, something on the floor, or something you need to step over. Having similar floor tones between rooms can allow you to move around more freely.
- Make sure your home is as easy to navigate as possible – avoid placing furniture where it might block your way and keep your paths through rooms clear.
- It might be useful to have Post-it Notes or another prompt as you leave the house to remind yourself to pick up your keys and lock the front door.
- If you're worried about going out alone and being unable to find your way home, place curtains over the door or put 'STOP' reminder signs on the inside of the door. There are also devices that can alert somebody if you go out at night.

# The living room

Everybody wants to feel comfortable and safe in their living room. You can make small adjustments to help it stay a relaxed and reassuring place:

- Remove any trip hazards like rugs, trailing wires and clutter from the room to help prevent falls.
- Avoid using glass furniture, such as coffee tables, as it's harder to see and could cause you to trip.
- Photos of family members, friends, occasions and old photos from childhood can be comforting and help trigger memories. You might want to label photos with names and relationships to help you remember exactly who's who.
- Listening to music or to the radio can have a calming effect and remind you of your favourite tunes. You could try using playlists to help with certain moods or memories.



# The kitchen

Whether it's remembering where things are kept or how to do certain things, navigating the kitchen can be a daily challenge. But some small changes can make things a lot easier:

- Leave out everyday items on the worktops to make sure they're easy to find.
- Label cupboards and drawers to make it easier to locate what you want. Photographs of the contents stuck on the door can also be helpful to remind you what's inside. You can also label containers of frequently used items, such as tea and sugar, and keep them in sight or use clear plastic containers so you can see what's inside.
- Label cleaning products to avoid any confusion.
- Keep any pet food labelled and away from other food products.
- Alternatively, install open shelving units or fit clear cupboard doors, though this is likely to be more costly than labelling things.







- Write out step-by-step instructions for regular tasks and leave them near relevant appliances to help you keep doing these things independently. For example, you could put tea-making instructions by the kettle.
- Use contrasting tones for cups and plates to make it easier to identify food. For example, mashed potato on a white plate can be difficult to see. A contrasting plate will make the food more noticeable.
- Be careful when using stainless steel appliances such as kettles or toasters, as they can get very hot and could cause a burn. You might want to put a sign near appliances that can get hot to remind you.
- Label plugs so you know which belongs to which appliance.
- If you might forget you've left the cooker on, you can buy a device for electric hobs and cookers that turns them off for you. Some newer cookers have automatic shut-off mechanisms which can turn them off after a set amount of time.

# The bedroom

Adapting the bedroom doesn't necessarily involve buying expensive equipment. There are lots of simple changes that can make a difference:

- If you often get up during the night, consider using a night light, or a motion-activated light that only comes on when you get out of bed.
- Pressure mats placed under the mattress or beside the bed can detect if you get up and don't return to bed within a certain time. This alerts an emergency response centre or a chosen contact, such as a friend or relative.
- Use bedding that contrasts in colour with the floor to help ensure the bed is visible. You might prefer a plain colour, as highly patterned duvets and blankets can be visually confusing.
- Too much choice can be a problem for everyone – especially when deciding what to wear. You can make things a bit easier by trying not to keep too many clothes, shoes or cosmetics on shelves or in wardrobes.
- If you're starting to find it difficult to get dressed, you could lay the clothes out in the order they should be put on, with underwear first.
- We can all leave our bedroom in a bit of a mess but it's best to remove any trip hazards like clothes on the floor, trailing wires, rugs and clutter.
- It might be a good idea to keep special mementos in a safe place, with a label to remind you where you've put them. Small pieces of jewellery can be easy to misplace so consider using a jewellery box.

## The bathroom

Not being able to find the toilet when you need it can be very stressful. The bathroom is a space that gets used a lot so it's important that it's safe and easy to get to. Here are some ideas to help:

- Paint the bathroom door a bright colour, use a sign on the door (on the inside or outside – or both), or leave the door open so the room can be seen easily.
- Set the water heater to a safe temperature.
- Buy bath and sink plugs that change colour when the water is above a certain temperature to let you know to be careful.
- Buy bath and sink plugs that let water out automatically when the bath becomes too full.
- Installing a different coloured toilet seat and lid can make it much easier to see.
- Keep most medicines out of reach, but put those you need available in an automated pill box. Clear out the medicine cabinet and ask your local chemist to dispose of out-of-date or unwanted medications. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about your medication storage options.
- If you find mirrors confusing you can cover them up, and only uncover them when needed.
- Think about changing your sink or taps to separate hot and cold taps that are labelled well.
- You may benefit from installing grab rails, or an adaptation such as a walk-in shower to help you use the bathroom safely. Help might be available through your local council. See page 20 for more information.

# Lighting

Unfortunately, our eyesight gets worse as we get older, so it's really important to make sure where you live is lit properly. This is even more important when living with dementia. Here are some tips:

- Use brighter lightbulbs or lamps to brighten up darker areas of your home.
- Open your curtains during the day to let in as much natural light as possible.
- Install night lights or motion-activated lights that come on if you get up in the night.
- Use brighter colours for walls, furniture and furnishings where possible – though it's best to avoid patterns. Vibrant colours can help a room look and feel brighter.
- Have even lighting around the home to minimise shadows.
- Light on a shiny floor can produce glare and be mistaken for a puddle, so try to minimise this where possible, for example by using blinds.
- Avoid using spotlights where possible, as they can cast shadows on faces and make it harder to see people.
- Make sure windows are clean and not blocked by anything outside, such as bushes or plants, to get as much natural light into the home as possible.
- Use coloured tape or labels to highlight light switches.



## Anne made some simple adaptations to help her stay independent.

**Anne, 73, used labels around the home to make her life a bit easier.**

'I'd started to notice I was getting a little more confused around the house. I was struggling with the television remote, and I was finding it hard to remember where things should go after I did the washing up.

'My daughter made some labels and stuck them up around the place. The kitchen cupboards, remote control and light switches are now all labelled. It seemed like such a simple change, but it's made all the difference. Now the cutlery doesn't go walkabout!'



# Getting out and about

Getting fresh air is good for your physical and mental wellbeing, so try and go out if you can. If you enjoy going for a walk, gardening or sitting outdoors, then a few adjustments can help you continue to do this as safely and independently as possible:

- Fitting exterior handrails makes the garden and outside areas more accessible and can help you feel steadier.
- You could mark the edges of steps outside with anti-slip tape or paint so that you can see them more easily to avoid a fall – but make sure any tape is stuck down properly.
- If you like gardening, get a set of tools that have brightly coloured, long, or easy-grip handles to make things easier. The organisation Thrive provides support for older and disabled people to do gardening. Contact them for further advice (page 23).
- Install a police-approved key safe. These are used to lock away spare keys securely and can only be opened using a code or password. Only trusted friends, relatives or neighbours should be given the code, so they can access the property when needed.
- You may be eligible for a Blue Badge if you or your carer has reduced mobility. This allows you to use disabled parking spaces, which are often closer to the shops. You can apply for one online at **GOV.UK**. In Northern Ireland, you can apply online at **nidirect.gov.uk**.
- Some local councils offer volunteer community transport or subsidised taxi schemes, which may help you stay independent if you don't feel able to drive and don't feel confident using public transport.
- Put a 'no cold callers' sign at the front door to deter doorstep sellers. See our guide **Avoiding scams** for more information.

- You might want to tell your neighbours about your diagnosis and how it affects you so they can help out if needed. It could reassure you to know that they are keeping an eye on things.
- Consider telling people in your local area that you have dementia, such as the staff at your favourite café, so that they can help you if needed.
- Fill in a Helpcard and keep it in your wallet or purse. These say that you have dementia and contain basic personal information and contact details in case of emergency or if you need assistance. Contact the Alzheimer's Society for more information (page 22).
- If you're worried about getting lost when out and about, you can buy a tracking device. These are available in the form of a watch or a small mobile device. You can take it with you wherever you go. It allows a loved one to see where you are, which can be really reassuring – both for you and for them.



# General tips for the whole home

There are some general changes you can make around your home that help you to keep doing the things you've always done and stay independent for as long as possible:

- Talk to your local council or fire and rescue service about what they provide, and whether you might be eligible for free equipment, advice or a safety check.
- Keep a list of important contacts, such as loved ones and anyone else you think may be useful, by the phone. You can get phones that can be pre-programmed with important numbers which will dial at the press of a button.
- Buy a clock that has the day of the week, date and time clearly displayed.
- It might help to replace patterned carpets or rugs with plain ones, as patterned carpets or rugs can sometimes look like uneven ground or a hole. It can also be a good idea to change your curtains to plain ones, too.
- Place signs or labels around the home so you can identify where things are or which door leads to which room. They can be especially helpful if they include a picture. You may like to remove some doors altogether.
- It's easy for things to get a little cluttered, but try to keep things cleared away where possible. Clutter can be visually confusing and be a trip hazard.
- Think about using an automated pill box. Some have an alarm to indicate when medicine needs to be taken. Others can be programmed so they allow access to medication only at the time it's needed. Discuss options with your GP or pharmacist.



- Consider installing flood, gas or heat detectors which send an alarm directly to a response centre or to a chosen contact, such as a family member. Some gas detectors can also switch off the gas supply when they detect a problem.
- Using a personal alarm can be really helpful. These allow you to call for help by pressing a button on a pendant or wristband, for example if you're unwell or have a fall and can't reach a telephone. An alarm goes through to a 24-hour response centre. Staff at the emergency response centre then call either a chosen contact person – a neighbour, relative or friend – or, if needed, the emergency services. A personal alarm can provide peace of mind, although they may not be suitable for everyone living with dementia.
- Carbon monoxide alarms should be installed in rooms with a fuel burning appliance. Smoke detectors should also be installed in appropriate areas. It's important that they're loud enough to wake you up. Some alarms trigger an alert to a call centre or a nominated person such as a carer. Check regularly that alarms are working – ideally twice a year. Contact your local fire service for more information.



# If you're reading this as a friend or family member

As a friend or family member of someone living with dementia, you may be wondering what you can do to help.

Having dementia can make it difficult for people to do some practical things – because of difficulties with memory, processing information or communicating. This could affect their daily life and it may help if they can make little changes to how they do things.

It's important that, where possible, families and friends support the person to do things for themselves rather than 'taking over'.

Change in itself can be difficult for people with dementia to manage, so if you decide to make any changes in the home of a friend or family member who is living with dementia, be guided by what they need and what works for them. This increases the person's wellbeing and helps maintain their dignity, confidence and self-esteem.

Not all of the changes highlighted in this guide will be needed or work for everyone. Some may be helpful now, while others may be better in the future or more appropriate if you don't live with the person with dementia. When considering changes:

- **Involve the person with dementia as much as possible.** Depending on the extent of their condition, try to approach things as a team and work together to find solutions. Focus on changes that support the person to do things they enjoy, rather than restricting their activities. Think about their likes and dislikes too.
- **Focus on one or two things at a time.** Conversations about lots of different changes can be overwhelming. We can all find it difficult to make decisions when there are too many choices.

- **Don't make unnecessary changes.** Someone with dementia may struggle to learn something new or adapt to changes in their home, especially if things are moved or replaced with something unfamiliar. Where possible, keep things in the same places, and if you buy new equipment or furniture try to find items that work in a similar way to what the person used before and are familiar in shape, colour or brand.
- **Agree any changes sooner rather than later.** The more time the person living with dementia has to adjust and get used to them, the better. It's possible that they may forget that they have agreed any changes.
- **Seek advice and information about making changes in the home.** You could consult an occupational therapist – they work with people to help them identify what aids or home adaptations may be helpful. You should be able to arrange an assessment through your local adult social services, your doctor, or privately.

## Next steps



For more general information about being a carer, see our guide **Advice for carers**.

To find out more about dementia, read our guides **Caring for someone with dementia** and **Living with dementia**.

# Care needs assessment

If your needs change or you need more help with things like washing or dressing, or if you have difficulty with domestic tasks, contact your local council's social services department to ask for a free care needs assessment. You are entitled to an assessment regardless of your income or savings.

We've outlined small adaptations you can make yourself in this guide. But it's worth having a care needs assessment as there may be some larger adaptations or specialist equipment that might help you too – such as a walk-in shower or grab rail.

Care needs assessments should be carried out by an assessor qualified to understand your individual needs. They'll look at your needs and consider how care and support could help you. You might want to continue living independently in your home but be finding it difficult. You'll be able to discuss any difficulties you have looking after yourself and the impact these have on your wellbeing.

If you qualify for help, your assessor will draw up a care plan with the support that is available to you, which could include adaptations or equipment to make your home safer and easier to live in.

## Next steps



For more information about a care needs assessment, see our guide **Getting help at home**.

# Useful organisations

## Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and website.

**Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65**

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

**[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**

In Wales, contact Age Cymru Advice: **0300 303 44 98**

**[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)**

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI: **0808 808 7575**

**[www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)**

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland: **0800 124 4222**

**[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

## Alzheimer's Society

Offers advice, information and support in England and Wales to people with dementia, their families and carers through its helpline and local branches.

General Customer Careline in England: **0330 333 0804**

Dementia Connect Support Line: **0333 150 3456**

**[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)**

National Helpline Wales: **0300 222 1122**

**[www.alzheimers.org.uk/wales](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/wales)**

In Northern Ireland, contact **Alzheimer's NI**

Tel: **028 9066 4100**

## Dementia Adventure

Provides adventure activities and holidays for people living with dementia and their friends and family. They also offer training for friends and family and can direct people to dementia friendly holiday venues.

Tel: **01245 237 548**

Email: **[info@dementiaadventure.co.uk](mailto:info@dementiaadventure.co.uk)**

**[www.dementiaadventure.co.uk](http://www.dementiaadventure.co.uk)**

## Dementia UK

Works to improve the quality of life of people with dementia. Contact them to find out if you have an Admiral Nurse service in your local area.

Tel: **020 8036 5400**

Email: **[info@dementiauk.org](mailto:info@dementiauk.org)**

**[www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)**

Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline: **0800 888 6678**

Email: **[helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)**

## **Living Made Easy**

Runs an equipment demonstration centre and provides information about equipment for daily living.

Tel: **0300 999 0004**

Email: **info@dlf.org.uk**

**www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk**

## **Research Institute for Disabled Consumers**

National research charity providing independent information to older and disabled consumers.

Tel: **020 7427 2460**

Email: **mail@ridc.org.uk**

**www.ridc.org.uk**

## **Thrive**

Helps people with disabilities enjoy gardening. There are regional centres in Reading, London and Birmingham and a database of over 600 garden projects. Staff can put you in touch with one nearest to you.

Tel: **0118 988 5688**

**www.thrive.org.uk**

## What should I do now?

You may want to read some of our relevant factsheets, such as:

- **Living with dementia**
- **Caring for someone with dementia**

You can order any of our guides or factsheets by giving our Advice Line a ring for free on **0800 169 65 65** (8am-7pm, 365 days a year).

Our friendly advisers are there to help answer any questions.

All of our publications are available in large print and audio formats.

There's plenty of really useful information on our website, too. Visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk/dementia](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/dementia)** to get started.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the below box, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



**0800 169 65 65**  
**[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**



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