



Environment- 01

ADAPTING YOUR HOME

The physical environment can have a major impact on a person living with dementia. This Help Sheet provides information for families and care partners on how to create a dementia-friendly environment that maximizes the wellbeing of people living with dementia at home and increases their participation in activities.

A dementia-friendly environment

Research has found that the environment can have a positive or negative effect on a person with dementia and can help a person with dementia 'hold on to their world by maintaining ties with familiar and comfortable surroundings'.

A dementia-friendly environment is one that promotes independence and supports wellbeing. It also:

- Draws on familiar surroundings.
- Allows for easy access and orientation within the person's home environment.
- Provides support for doing things the person enjoys.
- Provides support for participation in daily activities.
- Provides aids to support safety, security and independence.

Factors to consider for the person

Before discussing making changes in the home with the person, think about some of these things:

- What physical or thinking changes is the person experiencing? For example, difficulty finding familiar items around the home.
- How can I help the person continue to feel comfortable and relaxed at home?
- How can I help the person continue doing things they enjoy at home?
- What can I do to help the person continue to feel valued and included in daily life?
- When is the best time of day to discuss making these changes in the home?
- What aids, cues or prompts such as clocks, signs or a message board may help the person manage daily tasks?

How to improve lighting.

- Replace current globes with brighter globes to support good lighting within the home.
- Open curtains/blinds fully to maximize the daylight within individual rooms.
- Position seating for reading or hobby activities to take advantage of sunlight.
- Consider using additional lighting such as floor or table lamps when performing tasks such as reading.
- Consider using sensor lighting, which can reduce the risk of falls at night.

Lounge room.

- Create an opportunity for a quiet space to sit, relax or read.
- Ensure opportunities are available to perform meaningful activities or favorite hobbies or pastimes.
- Place personal photos and items around the room to provide pleasant memories and opportunities for reminiscence.
- Use different textures and colors in living rooms to provide sensory engagement e.g. knitted blankets, soft cushions.
- Reduce clutter and remove potential hazards such as loose electrical cords or rugs, and provide storage for items to ensure sufficient space to move around.
- Use contrasting colors for floors, walls and furnishings for visual identification.

Kitchen

- Ensure there is sufficient room and lighting (over the cupboard lighting and under cupboard lighting) to perform tasks in the kitchen.
- Place regularly used items in the line of sight and group common items together.
- Use labels and clear canisters to help locate items.
- If necessary, use labels on cupboards or replace some solid doors with see-through ones to easily view items.
- Replace appliances that are not working with ones similar of design to support familiarity.
- Use flood detectors, monitors and thermostat controls to reduce hazards or risks.
- Utilize whiteboards and calendar clocks for orientation and important reminders.

Dining room

- Consider using contrasting colors for table settings– place mats, plates, table cloth and glassware to improve the visibility of each item.
- Ensure that there is adequate lighting during meal times such as using overhead lighting, side lamps and wall lighting or opening curtains.
- Keep table settings simple and select suitable background music to create a pleasant atmosphere promoting open communication.
- Ensure that dinnerware is simple and not distracting– patterns can be confusing and can make it difficult for the person to distinguish between the dishes and the food.
- Consider adaptive cutlery and dishes, which can assist some people during meal times.

Bedroom

- Ensure that there is adequate lighting; for example, sensor lighting can reduce the risk of falls at night time.
- Use block out curtains or blinds to regulate sleeping patterns and stop shadows appearing on the window from outside trees and shrubs.



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- Remove clutter within the bedroom to ensure clear pathways, e.g. chairs, tables, clothes, shoes, rugs.
- If necessary, use labels to identify items in drawers and cupboards in the bedroom.
- Display a selection of daily clothing and shoes on a stand or a section of the wardrobe for easy access, as a way of promoting decision making and supporting independence.

Bathroom

- Consider warmer color tones for floors and walls and ensure that the room temperature is comfortable when using the bathroom.
- Place regularly used items in a group within the line of sight and at a height that is accessible.
- Use anti-flood devices, devices for releasing excessive water in bath, floor and fall detectors, and ensure that drainage holes are clear to reduce risks.
- Use faucets that are familiar and easy to use, and install thermostat or hot water cut off devices to regulate and monitor hot water temperature.
- Use color contrast to highlight items such as bath rails, door handles and toilet seats.
- Consider covering or removing mirrors. Some people lose the ability to differentiate between what they see in the mirror (themselves or you) and reality.
- Use devices for releasing excessive water in bath, floor and fall detectors.

Yard

- Ensure safe and clear pathways within the yard by considering overhanging branches, plants with thorns, moss, mold, uneven or broken pavers or loose gravel.
- Use clearly defined pathways around the yard that do not lead to dead ends.
- Make careful selection of plants to avoid varieties that are poisonous when in contact with the skin.
- Ensure there are shaded places to sit and relax in and look at the yard from either inside or outside the house.
- Create an opportunity to grow a vegetable or herb garden.
- Use water features to add an extra sensory dimension ensuring it is clearly and safely delineated.

References: Cohen, U., and Weisman, G. (1988). *Environments for people with dementia: Design guide*. Washington, DC: Health Facilities Research Program of the American Institute of Architects and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture.

FURTHER INFORMATION: locally call Dementia Friendly Wyoming 307-461-7134 or visit our website <http://www.dwfsheridan.org> or The Sheridan Senior Center 307-672-2240. Nationally contact the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900, or visit their website at <http://www.alz.org>