



Early Stage Dementia: **A carers guide to** **creating a dementia** **friendly home**



Being Dementia Aware

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Introduction

For most people living with dementia it is important to them to remain in their own home for as long as possible. This guide looks at the changes you could make for people living with dementia to allow them to remain independent, safe and comfortable in their own home.



If you are a carer, friend, or family member

If you are wondering what you can do to help someone you know living with dementia remain safe and in their own home, there is a lot you can do to help. Before making any changes, it is worth considering the following points.

- **Not all changes will work for everyone** - dementia can affect people in different ways. Any changes you make should consider their own unique situation including any other long-term conditions or disabilities which may affect someone living with dementia.
- **Involve the person living with dementia as much as possible** - depending on the progression of their dementia, try to work together to look at what would help, find solutions and focus on changes that support them to do things rather than those that may restrict their day to day activities. Try to include their likes and dislikes too, for example, which colours they prefer.
- **Do not make unnecessary changes** - a person living with dementia may struggle to learn something new or to adapt to changes in their home, especially when things are moved or replaced with something unfamiliar. If possible, keep things in the same places or if you are buying new furniture and equipment, try to find items that are similar in shape, colour and brand to what they already have.
- **Plan for the future** - where you can, agree any changes with the person you care for sooner rather than later. This will give the person living with dementia time to adjust and to get used to them. It is possible that in the future they may forget that they have agreed to any changes.
- **Seek professional advice** - you or the person you care for have the right to request a care assessment from you council's social work department which may give you information on changes to make. Your council may also provide financial help with the cost of making some of these changes. If you have a Dementia Link Worker, you can always speak to them.

For more information see our 'Caring for someone with Early Stage Dementia' guide, available to download from our website or to arrange for a copy to be sent by phoning the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.

- **Fire Safety** - There are fire risks for people living with dementia. From forgetting to switch off electric fires, placing metal in microwaves, forgetting to blow out candles or putting out cigarettes. People may also leave the cooker or gas on or may accidentally place an electric kettle on a gas hob.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service can visit for a free home fire safety visit and can make sure that the person living with dementia's home is as safe as it can be. The Fire and Rescue Service can, for example, fit a smoke alarm or provide non-flammable bedding.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

0800 0731 999

www.firescotland.gov.uk



Keeping warm in winter

People living with dementia may find that they forget to keep warm during the winter, sitting in cold rooms or not wearing enough layers of clothing. Being cold for any length of time can increase the risk of colds, flu and hypothermia, heart attacks and stroke. It is important that they should keep their home at an appropriate temperature throughout the year to prevent them from getting too hot or too cold.

During the winter, the rooms they spend the day in should be kept warm to at least 23°C. Keep the bedroom window closed at night so you do not breathe in cold air as this can increase the risk of chest infections. Layer clothing to maintain body heat and try not to sit down for long periods of time by getting up and moving about.

There are benefits, grants and schemes which may help you make a home more energy efficient and improve your heating. Contact Home Energy Scotland for information and advice.

Home Energy Scotland

0808 808 2282

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/home-energy-scotland



What financial support may be available to adapt your home?

Councils have a duty to provide assistance to make a house suitable for a disabled person. The council must give a “mandatory grant” for any changes that they consider to be essential. Grants can be given to adapt a house to enable access to the toilet, bath or shower, wash hand basin and sink. This could include installing handrails, a level access shower or lowering worktops. The minimum level of grant is 80% of the cost. If the person with dementia receives any of the following benefits, they will get a 100% grant, meeting all the costs of the work.

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseeker’s Allowance
- Pension Credit (guarantee credit)
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Universal Credit

If they rent their home, they must seek their landlord’s consent before beginning any work. A landlord can withhold consent, but must have a good reason to do so. When giving consent a landlord can set certain conditions, such as asking to comment on plans or requiring that adaptations be removed when they move out.

If they can no longer safely live at home with a package of care and support they may need to think about long term housing options, such as sheltered housing or a care home. The decision to move home can be very difficult.

For more information see Age Scotland’s publications:

- **Housing options**
- **Older Homeowners: funding repairs, improvements and adaptations**

You can also contact the **Age Scotland Helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.

If you have internet access, you can find more information about housing on the **Scottish Government** website at: **www.gov.scot/housing**.

Care and Repair Scotland

Care and Repair services operate in most areas of Scotland to offer independent advice and assistance to homeowners. They repair, improve or adapt their homes so that people can live in comfort and safety. There may also be a handyperson service depending on the area, which may help if there are things around the house they can no longer manage to do for themselves. The service is generally available to people who own their own homes, private tenants and crofters who are aged 60 or over or who have a disability.

Care and Repair Scotland

0141 221 9879

www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk



Creating a dementia friendly home

Below are some general changes around the house that can help someone living with dementia to continue their day to day life as independently as possible.

Lighting

As people age, they need more light for their eyes to see well. Good lighting is even more important for those living with dementia, because their ability to understand what they see can be affected. For a home to be more dementia friendly:

- Let as much natural light in as possible. Pull back curtains and make sure windows are clean and not blocked by anything outside such as trees or bushes.
- Minimise shadows, as some people living with dementia resist going near dark areas.
- Avoid spotlights and reduce glare. Light on shiny floors can produce a glare and be mistaken for a puddle.
- Use coloured or neon reflective tape, if necessary, to highlight light switches so they are easy to find.
- Think about installing nightlights or motion activated lights which come on if the person gets up during the night to minimise the risk of falls.
- There are lux meter apps available to download for smart phones and tablets which will measure the lighting level of any room, which you may find useful as people living with dementia need more light.

Signposting around the house

- Signs and notices around the house can help to identify where things are, or which door leads to which room. They can especially be helpful if they include pictures as well as words.
- Signs and notices could be placed on the doors of the relevant room.

Use similar floor tones between rooms

- A threshold between rooms could be seen by a person living with dementia as a barrier preventing them from entering the room. Keep similar floor tones between rooms to encourage someone to move freely from room to room.

Contrasting furniture

- Furniture that contrasts in tone with the wall and floor makes it easier to identify the furniture against the background of the wall and floor. Choose contrasting tones with a mix of dark and light colours.

Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors

- Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors should be installed in or near the kitchen and in all sleeping areas.
- Check at minimum once a month that alarms are working, and replace the batteries at least twice a year.
- If the person living with dementia would not recognise and act when the alarm sounds, in some areas it is possible to install alarms that trigger an alert to a call centre or a nominated person such as a carer.



Clutter

- Clutter can be confusing on the eye and can act as a trip hazard. Try to keep things cleared away and tidy. Buy extra storage if needed, ensuring that any storage is labelled with its contents.
- If you are clearing out any clutter you must respect how the person living with dementia lives. It may matter to them to have things that are important to them on display or close to hand and easily to find when required.

Noise

- Noise can be distracting or distressing for a person living with dementia, especially if they cannot ignore it, or they do not know what it is or where it is coming from. This can be reduced, by ensuring internal doors are closed which can help reduce background noise.
- There are decibel meter apps available to download for smart phones and tablets which will measure the noise level in any room.

Patterned curtains and carpets

- Dementia can affect how some people see things: patterns on curtains, cushions or wallpaper may be confusing.
- A patterned carpet or rug might look like uneven ground or a hole, and rugs with speckled designs or dots may look as if they have things scattered on them.
- If you are changing the carpets or wallpaper, consider replacing them with a less patterned or plain design.
- For any changes that you do make, remember to be respectful of the views of the person living with dementia and consult them over any change.

Colour coded keys and locks

- You can buy different coloured tabs to put on keys and paint the lock with the colour of the correct key.

Clocks

- There are a range of dementia friendly clocks available to purchase. These include clocks that have the day of the week, date and time clearly displayed, or one with images such as a sun or moon to show if it is day or night.

Telephones

- You could buy a dementia friendly telephone. These include telephones with larger buttons for those with visual impairment and models that can include pictures of friends and family next to automatic dial buttons.



Technology

Some people with dementia find technology useful in their home. There are many different types of technology products available which vary in price. If you have internet access, for more information on the technology available to you visit **Dementia Circle** at <http://dementiacircle.org>. Dementia Circle is part of Alzheimer Scotland.

- **Assistive technology** can help people with daily tasks that they are starting to find more difficult:
 - **Item locators** can help to find easily lost items, such as keys. You can attach an electronic keyring to your set of keys and keep the locator button close by to you, so you easily find your keys.
 - **Reminder aids** can play messages at a certain time, such as a reminder to lock the door at night.
 - **Talking watches** are available to buy. At the press of a button they speak the time and date in a clear voice.
- **Telecare** supports people to remain safe in their home.
 - A personal alarm allows someone to call for help if they have fallen or are unwell.
 - Gas, smoke and flood detectors automatically alert staff at a response centre or a family member if there is a problem. Some gas detectors can switch off the gas supply when they detect a problem.
- **Digital technology** can be a useful tool to add to your home.
 - There are a range of computer programmes available to download for your smartphone or tablet which can support your daily life such as Mindmate and the IRIDIS app.

For more information on the range of dementia friendly devices available visit the **Scottish Disability Directory: www.disabilityscot.org.uk/directory**.

Care Information Scotland also provides information on available equipment: www.careinfoscotland.scot.

Mindmate allows you to document your life story, so you can remember special times and important events, such as a wedding or holidays: www.mindmate-app.com.

The **IRIDIS** app was created by the University of Stirling to promote a better quality of life. It advises you on a range of issues from recommending house design improvements and promoting a better quality of life: www.stir.ac.uk/iridis-app.

This illustration is of a dementia unfriendly living room. This can be improved:

Clocks:

Could replace with a clock which shows if it is day or night and the day of the week



Lighting:

Open the blind and curtains
Have a bright bulb in the lamp



Contrasts and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floors and furniture

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

Furniture:

If you are replacing any furniture, make sure that it is at a suitable height which takes into account any mobility issues.



Clutter:

Remove clutter and cables where you can

Do not move things which are precious to someone living with dementia

Label where you have put things away



Universal remotes:

Someone with dementia may find it easier to use a universal remote with its bigger buttons and simpler design. A universal remote allows control of all electronic devices in the room.

Temperature:

Make sure that the room is at a comfortable temperature ideally around 23C°.



Any decisions about changes should involve the person living with dementia and take their views into account where possible.

This illustration is of a dementia unfriendly kitchen. This can be improved:



Install:

- Smoke detector
- Carbon monoxide detector
- Gas switch off valve

Storage:

Clearly label cupboards with their contents; use words and images or remove cupboard doors or replace cupboard doors with clear doors

Contrasts and patterns:

- Clear colour contrasts between wall, floors, work surfaces, crockery and equipment
- Aim for plain colours not strong patterns
- Minimise shiny surfaces
- Change glass topped furniture

Kitchen equipment:

- Choose a kettle which switches off automatically
- If you are replacing equipment, try to choose a familiar design and colour
- Look for equipment with large buttons and not too many choices



Lighting:

Minimise glare and shiny surfaces
Light areas evenly
Have strip lights if this helps to identify fridges, washing machines and cupboards

Risks:

Minimise clutter on the floor and on work surfaces

The kitchen can also be used to place reminder notes such as on the fridge or cupboard doors.

This illustration is of a dementia unfriendly bedroom. This can be improved:



Wardrobes and storage:

You could add labels to drawers and wardrobes

You could buy a clothes rail to make it easy to see clothes and put suitable outfits together

Contrasts and patterns:

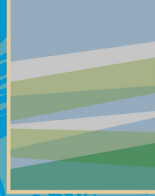
Clear colour contrasts between walls, floors, furniture and bedding

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns



Bedroom Lighting:

Replace curtains for a heavy weight pair, or a blackout blind, which will make the bedroom darker at night



Alarm Clock:

Could replace with a clock which shows if it is day or night and the also the day of the week

For someone who is visually impaired, talking clocks are also available. For more information on talking clocks you can visit www.rnib.org.uk

This illustration is of a dementia unfriendly bathroom. This can be improved:

Glass and mirrors:

Remove or cover mirrors which cause glare or confusing reflections

The bath and shower:

- Grab rails may help to get in and out of the bath
- Flood detectors could stop the bath getting too full
- Anti-slip mats can reduce the risks of falls
- Set water temperature to avoid the risk of scalding
- A shower curtain would reduce glare
- Have hot and cold taps, not mixer taps
- A shower stool can also be useful if you have problems standing in the shower



Contrasts and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floors, bath, shower, toilet and toilet seat, towels and mats

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

Bathroom door:

Consider labelling or painting the door and leaving it open when the bathroom is not in use, so it is easy to see the toilet

Consider removing the bathroom door lock

Storage:

Clearly label cupboards with their contents; use words and images or remove cupboard doors

Speak to a pharmacist about the options available to storing medications safely

This illustration is of a dementia unfriendly hall. This can be improved:

Colours and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floor, stairs and banister

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

Mark the edges of steps with colour



An illustration of a cluttered front door area. The background is a wall with a repeating pattern of stars and floral motifs. A wooden door is the central focus. To the left, a wooden staircase railing is visible. In the foreground, there is a pile of white envelopes and papers on a patterned rug. A tiger is lying on the rug near the door. A pair of yellow boots is on the left. A shopping bag and a newspaper are on the right. A keychain with a purple tag is hanging from a door handle. A white box is on the floor near the door.

The front door:

Have colour contrast between the door, walls and floor

Have a handle and lock which are easy to see and use

Consider an intercom

Have a checklist on the door about locking up at night or when going out

Keep keys somewhere safe

Hazards:

Remove clutter

Open mail and deal with important matters

Dementia unfriendly outside space



Accessibility: The easier the access to a garden is, the more likely it is that someone with dementia will be able to benefit from being outside. There are many adaptations that can be made;

Handrails: For some people, adding handrails with colour contrast outside the front and back door can help with climbing any steps or getting through the door.

Paths: Paths should be level, clear and well defined: paths which run in a loop are easy for people living with dementia to follow.

Lighting: Especially in the evening, open spaces should be brightly lit to help with moving around the garden or driveway. This could include outside lights near benches or other features

Seating: Benches in gardens should be easy to move if you need to, in good condition, and in an accessible location.



Planting: Non-toxic plants can be good for sensory stimulation with their different textures to touch and different smells.

Gardening also offers opportunities for reminiscence and provides a useful activity.

Garden beds can also be raised to allow easier access when gardening.

Getting outside has many benefits for people living with dementia – providing physical exercise, stress relief and even impacting on sleep patterns. These are ideas for ensuring any outside spaces are dementia friendly.



Useful contacts

Age Scotland

Age Scotland is the largest charity in Scotland dedicated to enabling everyone to make the most of later life. We provide information for people through our publications and online. The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice,

0800 12 44 222 / www.agescotland.org.uk

Alzheimer Scotland

Alzheimer Scotland is the leading dementia organisation in Scotland. It campaigns for the rights of people with dementia and their families and provide an extensive range of innovative and personalised support services.

0808 808 3000 / www.alzscot.org.uk

Care Information Scotland

Care Information Scotland provide information and advice to carers and people who want to know more about care services.

0800 011 3200 / www.careinfoscotland.scot

Care and Repair Scotland

Local Care and Repair services offer advice and assistance to older people and disabled homeowners in most areas of Scotland to repair, improve or adapt their homes so they can live safely and comfortably.

0141 221 9879 / www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk

Disability Information Scotland

Disability Information Scotland provide information and advice on a range of issues to those who are disabled, friends, family and carers.

0300 323 9961 / www.disabilityscot.org.uk

Email: info@disabilityscot.org.uk

Disabled Living Foundation

The Disabled Living Foundation provide information and advice on equipment and technology for daily living.

0300 999 0004 / www.dlf.org.uk

Home Energy Scotland

Home Energy Scotland give information and advice on how you can save money and energy and make your home warmer.

0808 808 2282 / www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/home-energy-scotland

Scottish Fire and Rescue

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service can make sure your home is as safe as it can be. You can contact them for a free home safety visit.

0800 0731 999 / www.firescotland.gov.uk



Our other publications:



 **ageScotland**
helpline  Information, friendship and advice
0800 12 44 222



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0333 323 2400
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www.agescotland.org.uk

Age Scotland helpline
0800 12 44 222

Age Scotland Enterprises
0800 456 1137 (Edinburgh)
0800 500 3159 (Glasgow)



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Age Scotland, part of the Age Network, is an independent charity dedicated to improving the later lives of everyone on the ageing journey, within a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland. Registration Number 153343. Charity Number SC010100.