

At **home** with dementia

Tips for making your home dementia-friendly



Information written with you

Our guides are
help of older people
expert peer review

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Their feedback helps us ensure our information is as useful as possible for older people and their carers, family and friends.

www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel

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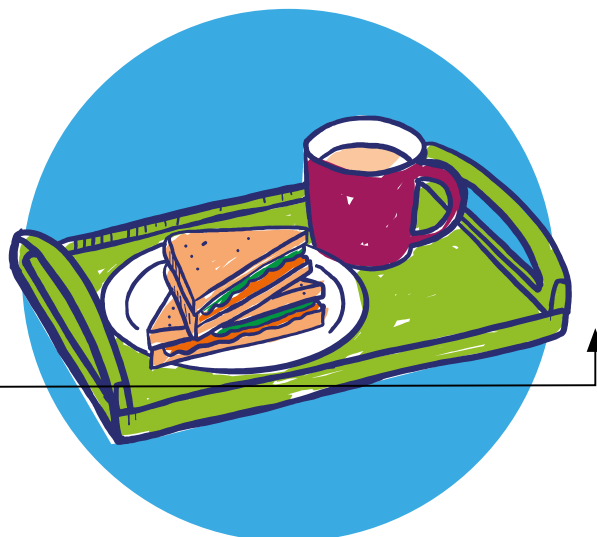
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What this guide is about

If you have dementia, there are practical things you can do around your home to make day-to-day life easier.

This guide gives tips on how you can adapt different areas of your home to make them work better for you. They're only suggestions and not all of them will work for everyone – so you can try things out or just choose what you think might work for you.

Making changes could help you live safely and independently in your own home for longer. It could also reassure your family or carers.



As far as possible, the information in this guide applies across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. If you're in Scotland, contact Age Scotland for advice.

Who this guide is for

This guide is written for people living with dementia, but it can also be useful for friends, families and carers.

If you're reading this for someone else, there are lots of handy tips in each section that might be helpful – but there's also information specifically for you on pages 18-19.

There's a list of useful organisations that can give further advice and support at the back of this guide (pages 21-22).

Master items. Never change – apart additional guides. Client tells you after proof V1



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:

Stairs and hallways

Here are some tips to help avoid confusion and reduce your risk of falling when you're moving from room to room:

- Avoid dark doormats, which can sometimes look like a hole in the ground if you have dementia.
- Move rugs and mats from the top or bottom of the stairs – they can be a trip hazard.
- Mark the edge of each step with paint or anti-slip tape to help you judge their depth. Make sure any tape is stuck down well.
- Sometimes the threshold between rooms can look like a step or something on the floor you need to get around. Having similar flooring between rooms can help you move around more freely. It's worth bearing in mind that shinier floors can look like they're wet if you have dementia.
- Consider getting a simple telephone with large buttons. You could pre-programme important numbers too, or have them written by the telephone.
- Avoid placing furniture where it might block your path through or between rooms.
- Leave a note or another prompt at eye level 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 forgetting your way home, place curtains over the door or put **STOP** signs on the inside of the door at eye level. There are also devices that can alert somebody if you go out.

The living room

There are small adjustments you can make to help keep the living room a relaxed and reassuring place:

- Remove trip hazards like rugs and trailing wires.
- Avoid glass furniture (such as coffee tables) as it's harder to see and could cause you to trip.
- Photos of relatives, friends and special occasions can be comforting and help trigger memories. You could label photos with names and relationships to help you remember who's who.
- Listening to music or the radio can have a calming effect and bring back fond memories. You could try using playlists to help with certain moods or memories.
- Note down the details of your favourite TV programmes, such as the channel and time they're on. You might find it helpful to get a simple remote control – these only perform main functions like changing the channel or volume, so they have fewer buttons than other remotes.



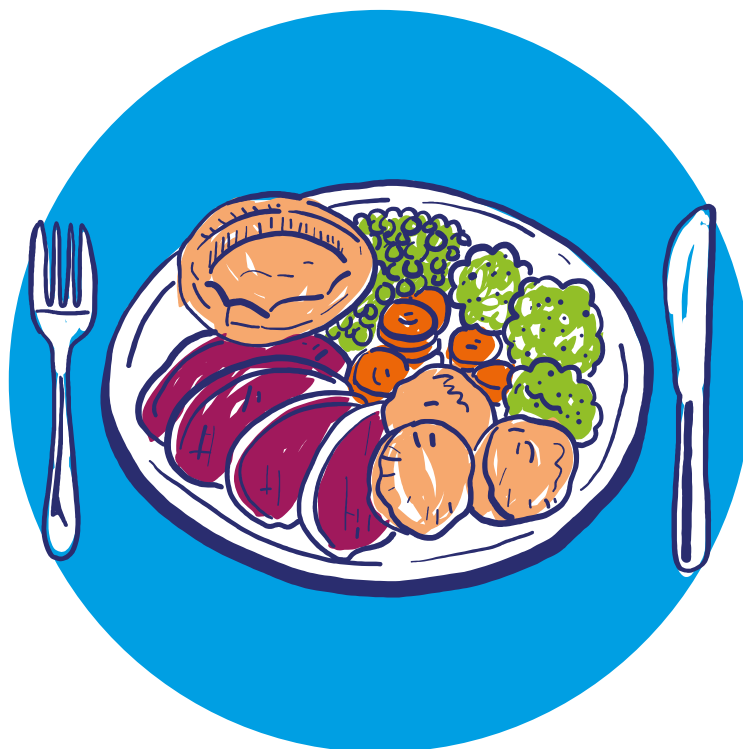


The kitchen

Some small changes can help you remember where things are kept or how to do certain tasks in the kitchen:

- Leave everyday items like tea and sugar out on worktops to make them easier to find – you can also label them or use clear plastic containers to see what's inside.
- Label cupboards and drawers to make it easier to find what you want. Photographs stuck on the door can also be helpful to remind you what's inside. Some people remove cupboard doors altogether. You could also consider installing open shelving units or clear cupboard doors, although this would cost more.
- Label cleaning products and keep them all in the same place, away from food products.
- Label any pet food and store it away from your food products.
- The kitchen can be a good place to have a wall calendar or whiteboard to keep track of tasks and activities.

- Write out step-by-step instructions for everyday tasks and leave them near relevant appliances. For example, you could put tea-making instructions by the kettle.
- Use contrasting plates and cups to make it easier to identify food and drink. Mashed potato on a white plate can be difficult to see, for instance.
- Be careful when using stainless steel appliances, such as kettles or toasters, as they can get very hot. You might want to put notes near appliances that can get hot to remind yourself.
- Similarly, it can be helpful to label your hot and cold taps.
- Label plugs so you know which plug belongs to which appliance.
- If you might forget you've left the cooker or hob on, you can buy a device that turns them off for you. Some newer models have automatic shut-off mechanisms that work after a set amount of time. Alternatively, you could get sensors that detect when you leave the kitchen and remind you to turn things off.



The bedroom

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

- If you often get up in the night, consider using a night light or a motion-activated light that only comes on when you get out of bed.
- Pressure mats 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.
- Leaving the bedroom door open and having a light on the landing can help you find the toilet at night.
- Use bedding that contrasts with the floor to ensure the bed is visible. You might prefer a plain colour, as highly patterned bedding can be visually confusing.
- Too much choice can be confusing – make things a bit easier by trying not to keep too many clothes, shoes or cosmetics.
- If getting dressed is tricky, you could lay out clothes in the order they should be put on, with underwear first. Some people find it helpful to put whole outfits together on one hanger – such as a pair of trousers, a blouse and a jumper. Clothes with easier fastenings, like Velcro, may also make it easier to get dressed.
- Remove any trip hazards, such as clothes on the floor, trailing wires and rugs.
- Keep special mementos in a safe place, with a label to remind you where you've put them. Jewellery can be easy to misplace, so you could consider using a jewellery box.

The bathroom

It's important that the bathroom is safe and easy to find. Here are some ideas that may help:

- Paint the bathroom door a bright colour, use a sign on the door, or leave it 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 so that you know to be careful. You can also buy bath and sink plugs that automatically let water out when the bath becomes too full.
- Install a different-coloured toilet seat and lid to make them easier to see. Some people find it easier to use the toilet if the seat's left up or if the lid's taken off altogether.
- Put the medicines you need in an automated pill box and keep the rest out of reach. Clear out the medicine cabinet and ask your local chemist to dispose of out-of-date or unwanted medications. You can also talk to your GP or pharmacist about medication storage options.
- If you find mirrors confusing, cover them up and only uncover them when they're needed.
- Think about changing taps to separate hot and cold taps that are labelled.
- Grab rails, a shower stool, or an adaptation such as a walk-in shower could help you use the bathroom safely. Help might be available through your local council – see page 20 for more information.

Lighting

Proper lighting can make a real difference if you're living with dementia. Here are some tips to help:

- Use brighter lightbulbs or get some lamps to brighten up darker areas of your home.
- Fully open your curtains during the day to let in as much natural light as possible. It can be a good idea to take down net curtains or window dressings that stop light coming in.
- Make sure windows are clean and not blocked by anything outside, such as bushes or plants.
- Install night lights or motion-activated lights that come on if you get up in the night.
- Use contrasting colours for walls, floors and furnishings where possible. Vibrant colours can help a room look and feel brighter, though it's best to avoid busy patterns.
- Try to keep the lighting around your home even to minimise shadows.
- Light on a shiny floor can produce glare and be mistaken for a puddle, so try to minimise this where possible.
- Avoid using spotlights where possible, as they can cast shadows on faces and make it harder to see people.
- Use coloured tape or labels to make light switches stand out.

Anne made some simple adaptations to help her stay independent.

Anne, 73, used labels around the home to make 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

Fresh air is good for your physical and mental wellbeing, so getting outside if you can is important. A few adjustments can help you do this safely:

- Fit exterior handrails to help you feel steadier as you head outside.
- Mark the edges of steps outside with anti-slip tape or paint so that you can see them more easily – 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 (page 22) provides support for older and disabled people with their gardening.
- Install a key safe. These can only be opened using a code or password. Only people that might need access to your home, such as trusted friends, relatives or neighbours, should be given the code.
- 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 Wales, you can apply online at **GOV.WALES** and in Northern Ireland, you can apply online at **www.nidirect.gov.uk**.
- Some local councils offer subsidised taxi schemes or community transport run by volunteers, which may help you stay independent if you can't drive or use public transport.
- Put a 'no cold callers' sign on or near the front door to put off doorstep sellers. See our guide **Avoiding scams** for more information.

- You might want to tell trusted neighbours about your diagnosis and how it affects you so they can help out if needed. It could reassure you to know that they're keeping an eye on things. If you want to, you could give them a spare key just in case.
- Consider telling people you know in your local area, such as the staff at your favourite café, that you have dementia. This means they can help you if needed.
- Fill in a helpcard and keep it in your wallet or purse. This explains that you have dementia and contains basic personal information and contact details in case you need assistance or if there's an emergency. Contact Alzheimer's Society (page 21) for more information about helpcards.
- If you're worried about getting lost when you're out and about, you can buy a tracking system like a watch or a small mobile device. This means a loved one can see where you are, which can be really reassuring – both for you and for them.
- You can get mobile phones that are designed to be easier to use if you have dementia.



General tips for the whole home

There are some general changes you can make around your home that can help you stay safer and more independent:

- Keep a list of important contacts, such as loved ones or carers, by the phone. You can get phones that can be pre-programmed to dial important numbers at the press of a button.
- Consider getting some new clocks – for example, some people like clocks with large numbers or clocks that show the date and day of the week too.
- Replace patterned carpets or rugs with plain ones, as patterns can be visually confusing. It can also be a good idea to change your curtains to plain ones.
- Place signs or labels around the home so you can identify where things are, or which door leads to which room. Labels can be especially helpful if they include a picture. You may like to remove some doors altogether.
- Try to keep things clear and tidy where possible. A busy room can be visually confusing as well as 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. You can discuss these options with your GP or pharmacist.
- Try to do certain daily things together – like taking medication when you brush your teeth. It can be easier to remember things when they're part of a habit.
- Install flood, gas or heat detectors that 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.

- A personal alarm can be really helpful. These let you call for help via a button on a pendant or wristband – for example, if you're unwell or have a fall. Staff at an emergency response centre then call either a chosen contact 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.
- Talk to your local council and fire and rescue service about the services they provide, and whether you might be eligible for free equipment, advice or a safety check.
- Check you have smoke alarms installed, and test them regularly.
- 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. It's important that alarms are checked regularly – ideally twice a year. You can contact your local fire service for more information.



Next steps

For general information about keeping yourself safe when you're at home, online and out and about, see our guide **Staying safe**.

If you're reading this for someone else

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 someone to do practical things. It may help to make small changes. But it's important that, where possible, family and friends support the person to do something for themselves rather than doing it for them.

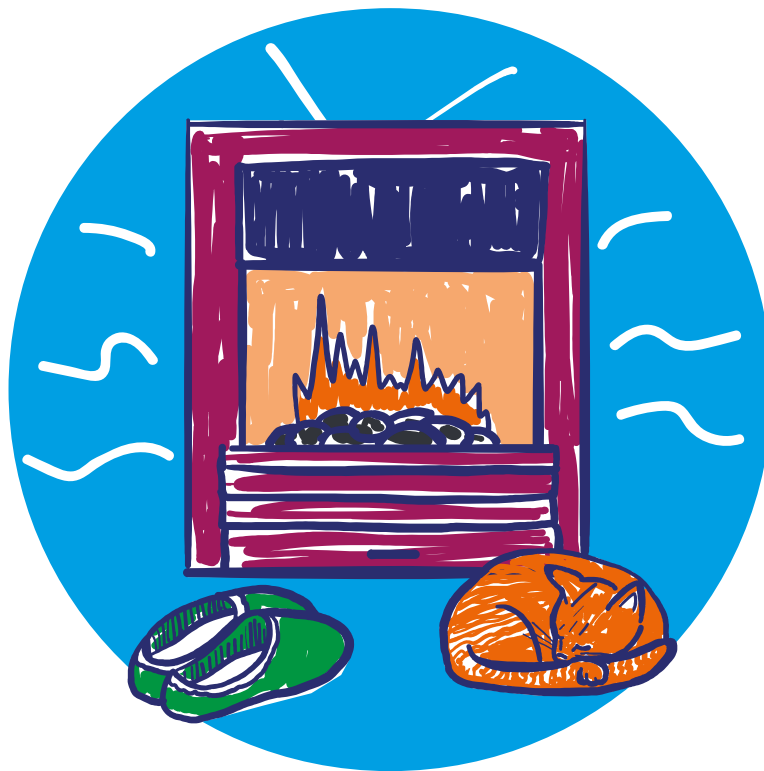
Be guided by what they need and what works for them. This helps maintain dignity, confidence and self-esteem.

Not all of the changes mentioned in this guide will work for everyone. Some may be helpful now, while others may be better in the future – and some might only be helpful if you don't live together.

When considering changes:

- **Involve the person living with dementia as much as possible.** Depending on their condition, try to approach things as a team and work together to find solutions. Focus on changes that support the person to do the things they enjoy, rather than restricting their activities.
- **Focus on one or two things at a time.** Lots of changes can be overwhelming. Making just a couple of changes at a time can make the process a little bit easier.
- **Don't make unnecessary changes.** The person living 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 place. If you buy new equipment or furniture, try to find items similar to what they used before.

- **Agree on any changes sooner rather than later.** The more time the person has to adjust and get used to changes, the better. It's possible that they may forget that they've agreed to any changes.
- **Seek information and advice about making changes in the home.** You could consult an occupational therapist – they help people identify aids or home adaptations that would be suitable. You should be able to arrange an assessment through your local adult social services department, their doctor, or privately.



Next steps

For more information, see our other guides **Advice for carers**, **Caring for someone with dementia** and **Living with dementia**.

Care needs assessment

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

Care needs assessments look at your needs and consider how care and support could help you. 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's available to you, which could include minor adaptations or equipment to make your home safer and easier to live in.

An occupational therapist can also visit you at home to assess whether any larger adaptations or specialist equipment could help you, such as a walk-in shower or hand rails.



Next steps

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

Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide information and advice 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

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

www.agecymru.org.uk

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

www.ageni.org

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

www.agescotland.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society

Offers advice, information and support to people living with dementia, their families and carers. You can also contact Join Dementia Research through the helpline.

Tel: **0333 150 3456**

www.alzheimers.org.uk

To order publications, email **orders@alzheimers.org.uk** or call the team on **0300 303 5933**.

Dementia Adventure

Provides dementia-friendly activities and holidays for people with dementia, as well as training for family and friends.

Tel: **01245 237548**

Email: **info@dementiaadventure.co.uk**

www.dementiaadventure.co.uk

Dementia UK

Specialist dementia nursing charity that provides advice, information and support. Contact their helpline to speak to an Admiral Nurse or visit their website to find out if you have a service in your local area.

Dementia Helpline: **0800 888 6678**

Email: **helpline@dementiauk.org**

www.dementiauk.org

Living Made Easy

Provides information about adaptations and aids to make life easier.

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Research Institute for Disabled Consumers

Offers independent information to older and disabled consumers.

Tel: **020 7427 2460**

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

www.ridc.org.uk

Royal College of Occupational Therapists

You can search their online directory if you're looking for a private occupational therapist.

Tel: **020 3141 4600**

www.rcot.co.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 you.

Tel: **0118 988 5688**

www.thrive.org.uk

Help us be there for someone else

We hope you found this guide useful. When times are tough, it's so important to get some support. You can help us reach everyone who needs us:

1

Tell us your story. If Age UK's information and advice has helped you, we'd love to hear about it. Email stories@ageuk.org.uk.

2

Donate to us. We rely on donations to support older people when they need us most. To make a donation, call us on **0800 169 8787** or go online at www.ageuk.org/donate.

3

Volunteer with us. Our volunteers make an incredible difference to people's lives. Find out more at www.ageuk.org.uk/volunteer or contact your local Age UK.

4

Campaign with us. We campaign to make life better for older people, and rely on the help of our strong network of campaigners. Add your voice at www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns.

5

Remember us in your will. A gift to Age UK in your will is a very special way of helping older people get expert support in the years to come. Find out more by calling **020 3033 1421** or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/legacy.

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now?

of our relevant information guides

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and factsheets on our website, along with visit **www.ageuk.org.uk** to get started.

es of any guide or factsheet by emailing our Advice Line on **0800 169 65 65**. Our with any questions.

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

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