Essex County Council

Supporting People Living with Dementia Through Environmental Adaptations: Information and Resources for Care Settings



Image generated by Microsoft Copilot

Compiled by Caroline Robinson, Senior Occupational Therapist, Provider Quality Team, Adult Social Care, Essex County Council.

working together with Prosper

Contents

1.	Purpose and introduction	2
2.	Dementia friendly design – video from SCIE	3
3.	Visual clues	3 - 4
4.	Helpful information from the Alzheimer's society	5 – 6
5.	Seating	6 – 7
6.	NHS information on how to make your home dementia friendly	8
7.	Dementia UK's resources	8
8.	Dementia Services Development Centre suggestions & video	9
9.	Further considerations	9-13
10.	Final message	14

1. Purpose and introduction

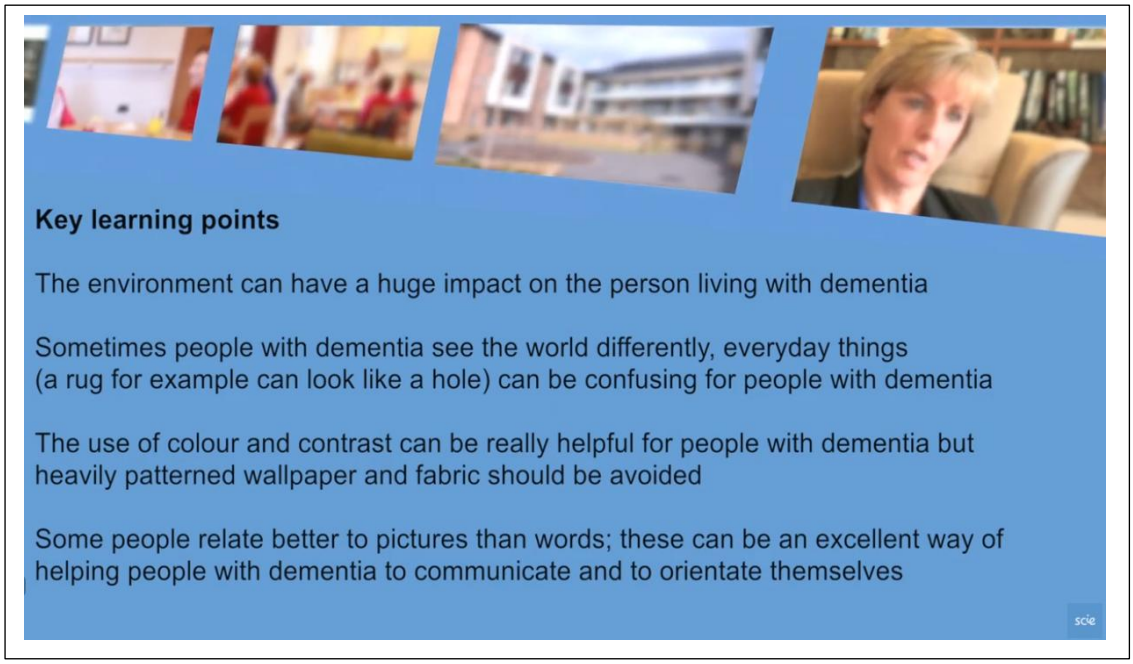
The purpose of this document is to support care home staff by providing suggestions and considerations when making environmental adaptations for residents living with dementia. The guidance draws on a range of external resources to highlight key areas for consideration. It is not intended to be prescriptive, as environmental adaptations should be tailored to the individual needs, preferences, and abilities of residents as part of a person-centred approach to care. Consequently, some recommendations may not be suitable or effective for all residents.

2. Dementia friendly environments, video from SCIE:

A useful film made by the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) shows how simple changes to create a more dementia-friendly care home environment can have a positive impact on a person living with dementia. It contains several suggestions and considerations for adapting care homes to reduce confusion and anxiety for people living with dementia.

You can access the film on the following link.

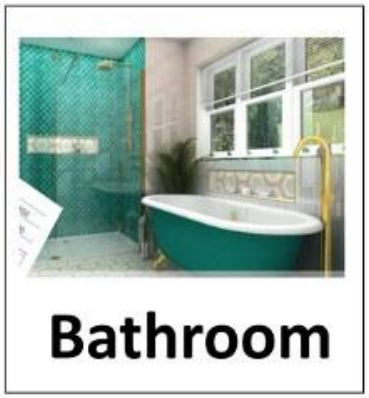
The key learning points in the film are;



3. Visual clues

Providing visual clues as to what is within each potentially 'hidden' space in the home may help the person with dementia identify where they are or what they need to find or do. Here are some examples:







Bedroom



Kitchen



The next three pictures are examples of what could be placed on the front of the cupboard to reveal its contents, or the cupboard door could be removed completely.







It is important to take pictures of your own environments and spaces to provide more meaning to the person. Try and limit the number of symbols used as these can be too abstract for the person, unless they are nationally recognised, like the toilet symbols.

4. The Alzeimer's society top 10

The Alzheimer's Society have compiled 10 ways to make your own home dementia friendly along with other suggestions for maintaining health and wellbeing. This is applicable to both care homes and the person's own home. This information was sourced from make your home dementia friendly.

Top 10:

1. Make sure you've got good lighting.

Check that natural light can get into your house – good lighting helps you see clearly and make sense of where you are. Make sure there's nothing blocking light from coming in through the window. Also make sure your bedroom is dark enough at night, as this will help you sleep better.

2. Make sure your flooring is safe.

Remove anything that could make you trip up. Get rid of any rugs or mats and watch out for other trip hazards like cables. Make sure you can see the flooring clearly too – plain matt flooring is best.

Avoid flooring that's shiny or that's a similar colour to the walls, as it may confuse you.

3. Make eating and drinking easier.

Eating and drinking well is important for your health. Use plates, cups and tablecloths with colours that contrast with food. Try using clear plastic containers to store your food, so you can see what's inside.

4. Get furniture that you can see clearly.

Dementia may affect how well you can tell the difference between colours. Use bright and contrasting colours to help you see furniture better. Avoid stripes and strong patterns as they can be confusing.

5. Remind yourself where things are.

If you have memory problems, you may forget where things are kept. Put pictures or signs on cupboards and drawers so you know what's inside them. Try to keep things like your keys, wallet and mobile phone in the same place.

6. Keep things simple in the bathroom.

Put a picture and sign on the door labelling the toilet or bathroom. Consider removing the toilet lid if it makes it easier to identify. It's also helpful to have towels and toilet rolls with colours that contrast the walls. Clear away items not used regularly.

7. Keep clutter-free.

Untidiness around the home may make you feel confused and distracted. Get rid of any excess clutter and make sure cupboards and drawers are tidy. Turn off the TV or radio when you're not watching or listening to them, so the noise isn't confusing or distracting.

8. Use equipment to keep yourself safe.

Use grab rails to hold onto and prevent yourself from falling. Installing smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors can also help keep you safe. Sensors can help too. For example, they can detect whether the water has been left running or the temperature is too high or low.

9. Keep active and engaged.

Keeping up with the things you enjoy is great for your quality of life. Use a large-faced clock and a calendar to help you keep track of the day and time, and the different things you're doing. Some people find a whiteboard helpful for writing down reminders.

10. Get outside.

Take opportunities to get outdoors – it's good for your wellbeing. Check that the front door is easy to tell apart from the others in the road or block. If you've got a garden, make sure there's somewhere you can sit and rest when you need to.

5. Consider seating

Seating provided in residential homes can sometimes be unsuitable for individual residents because furniture is often purchased in the same style, size, and height for multiple areas. The suggestions below will help you consider how seating can meet the needs of each resident while also supporting the wider resident population.



Chair raisers – these are a low-cost solution to have in your stores to enable you to adapt the heights of a person's chair to help prevent falls and increase independence





Pros	Cons
Achieve a better height for resident to stand from	Raisers not always compatible with chair legs
Low cost	Optimum height, still not able to transfer
Available for Riser Recliner Chairs	

Standard Riser recliners – having a small number of riser recliners will keep people independent for longer but remember to ensure that the person has the cognitive ability to understand how to use the controls to use it safely. Also placing any additional cushion onto the cahair as this is a falls **hazard.**

Pros	Cons
Height adjustable	No pressure care unless cushion is integral or overlay – not safe to place on top
Ability to recline if resident is fatigued	Often higher cost
Maintains independence for longer	



6. The NHS have produced useful information

The NHS website has produced a guide of some simple things you can do that may help someone with dementia to continue living independently at home. Available from How to make your home dementia friendly. This features information covering the following themes:

- Needs assessment
- Better lighting
- Reduce excess noise
- Safer flooring
- Contrasting colours
- Reflections can be troubling
- Labels and signs can help someone get around
- Dementia-friendly household items
- Gardens and outside spaces

7. Dementia UK's guide

Dementia UK have produced a helpful guide to support adapting your home. Click here to see the guide Making the home safe and comfortable for a person with dementia.



Within the guide they detail how to adapt the home for a person with dementia…

'The best way to identify possible hazards around the home is to take a room-by-room tour looking out for areas of risk and adaptations you could make. Try to involve the person in any changes you are making. If this is not possible, always make sure decisions are taken in their best interests.'

The booklet takes a step-by-step look through all the places within the home and poses suggestions.

8. Dementia Services Development Centre resource

‘**The Impact of the Environment for People Living with Dementia** provides a brief glimpse into some of the aspects of the environment we consider the most important when working with people with dementia. For ease of navigation, we talk about some of the reasons why some environments need to be adapted to help people with dementia maintain their independence in the first section. We then draw from our experience in practice, research, and adaptation to highlight some key issues that can occur at key places within the home, including in the bathroom, kitchen, and bedroom. In each section we highlight one or two examples of what might cause difficulties in each space and offer a few suggestions of how you might adapt the environment to help.’

Click the link to access the webpage.

At the bottom of the page is a useful video which talks about supportive environments. To access the video, click on this link.

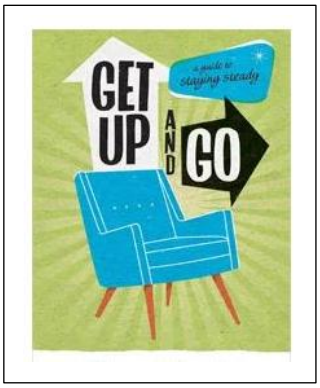
9. Further considerations

These are more helpful considerations when supporting people living with dementia:

a) Increase physical activity levels:

Ensure physical activity or movement is part of a normal daily routine for your residents and not just an ‘add-on’. Physical activity, or you may prefer to use the term, movement, is recommended by NICE as a multifactorial component to preventing falls for people with extended care. Movement can also help improve nutrition, hydration and sleep.

This helpful video from SAGA demonstrates a few daily exercises that could be incorporated the daily routine for residents. SAGA have also produced a helpful guide to support with falls prevention by increasing movement.



b) Consider introducing a wellbeing hour each day around sundowning to help reduce anxiety, confusion and improve nutrition. This could be by playing 'home spa' music, following a relaxation session online or completing a yoga session. Here are some examples of free options available:

- Relaxing music by Tim Janis, click link.
- Seated Yoga by Age UK Westminster, click link.
- Progressive relaxation video delivered by St Christophers Hospice, click link.

c) Consider what meaningful activities your residents would benefit from:

Meaningful activity is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of the individual accessing care and support.

Engaging in meaningful activities can improve physical fitness, boost emotional wellbeing, reduce loneliness and feelings of anxiety or depression, promote better sleep, provide a sense of purpose, and contribute to a lower risk of falls.

Maintaining meaningful activities add value and quality to a person's life. Activities can be different for everyone as it's what people value the most. This could be linked to hobbies they have or previously had, or usual tasks of daily life, such as, cooking, cleaning, gardening, self-care, and social activities.

- For example, a person who enjoyed bringing up their children and looking after their house, may benefit from being involved with activities such as laying tables, tidying up after mealtimes, folding laundry or pairing socks.
- For someone who used to be a postman, perhaps they would enjoy sorting letters or delivering post to residents.
- For someone who enjoyed DIY, they might like to support the maintenance team or access the local Men's Shed group.

d) Consider how much caffeine a person is consuming and at what time. Caffeine is known to interrupt a person's circadian rhythms which links to our sleep-wake cycles. Caffeine is a diuretic and can increase people's frequency needs for using the toilet. Caffeine can increase anxiety levels and heart rate. Introducing decaffeinated drinks may be a solution to consider. Here is a little more information to support this theory:

Anxiety and Caffeine:

No drug is used more widely in the world than caffeine. The commonality of caffeine, however, sometimes makes people forget that it is a powerful stimulant. In addition to keeping you alert and energised, consuming too much of has its costs. **Too much caffeine can lead to increased anxiety** or complicate an existing anxiety disorder by increasing symptoms.

Information source: https://www.psycom.net/anxiety-and-caffeine

Anxiety is our body's response to situations that we perceive as being worrisome or threatening, and it promotes our body's "fight or flight" response.

Caffeine also triggers this response, making you overreact to situations that aren't actually dangerous or troublesome. **Too much caffeine** can also make you **irritable** and **agitated** in situations that normally wouldn't affect you. And if you already have increased anxiety or suffer from panic attacks, **caffeine can cause these symptoms to become worse**.

Information source: https://www.psycom.net/anxiety-and-caffeine

Effects of caffeine include:

- agitation
- trouble sleeping
- restlessness
- twitching
- dizziness
- increased heart rate
- nausea
- diarrhoea
- changes in mood



Information source: https://www.psycom.net/anxiety-and-caffeine



Caffeine affects everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken

A rough guide is to have a maximum of 4 cups per day



e) What about creating a sensory room or space for residents living with dementia to access, this could help to reduce anxiety and promote wellbeing.



‘A sensory room offers the opportunity for an activity that is free from cognitive demands and allows residents to feel relaxed and entertained. While in a sensory room, residents receive a stream of stimuli that automatically increases their awareness of their surroundings.’ Blog extract from https://www.countrywidehealthcare.co.uk/blog/post/multi-sensory-room-for-seniors-with-dementia/

f) Altering aspects of the environment could meet people's sensory needs (there are 8 sensory systems which are touch, sight, sound, vision, hearing, proprioception, vestibular and interoception).

Auditory (noise)	Reducing noise during mealtimes by scraping plates away from the dining area
	Using noise reducing wall fixtures/acoustic panels or drapes to limit noise from people moving around and reduce background noise.
	Add soft pads or felt furniture feet to chair and table legs to reduce scraping sounds.
	Are there new, unfamiliar sounds in the environment– for example, a noisy broken extractor fan could be increasing a persons distress during personal care resulting in a person not wanting to go into the bathroom
	Consider using pagers rather than loud call bells, supplement phones with visual alerts or vibrating alerts. Provide advance warnings before fire drills or scheduled testing of alarms.
	Are noise-cancelling headphones or personal headphones available for individuals to manage their auditory experience, such as by playing their own music?
	Some people may need quieter spaces at times to help them regulate.
Visual	Overhead lighting may be too harsh or bright - maximise natural light, florescent lights can 'flicker, could alternative LED lights be used, or could alternative colours be used to reduce the brightness but maintain visability?
	Reducing visual distractions by turning off the television during mealtimes or when care routines are taking place, or reducing the amount of people in the space
	Consider where the person is sitting within the space – by altering the environment it could mean a reduction of noise, visual stimulation or reduce anxiety as the person can see people approaching them.
	Use subtle floor markings/colours to guide flow and clear labels to reduce disorientation.
Olfactory (smell)	Are there overwhelming smells in the area- could these be reduced/diffused? Diffusers with calming smells could be considered. Do staff need to be educated on the impact of strong fragrances?
	Are personal care and/or cleaning products being used with strong scents (perfumes, soap, shampoo, strong minty toothpaste) – could alterntatives being found with no scent or reduced scent.
Interoception	Is the environment prone to extremes of temperature – could adjustments be made to reduce this? Consider placement of chairs. If hot: consider use of plain blinds, fans, reducing the overall temperature. If cold: consider blankets/covers, warmer fabrics.
	Offer reminders for drinking and flexible access to snacks. Consider prompts for body awareness – for example asking 'are you feeling warm?' or 'thirsty?'
	Visual aids can support body awareness – emotion scales, hunger, thirst, needing the toilet.
Tactile (touch)	Does the person appear distressed with certain fabrics, or objects when they touch them? Consider if alternatives could be used.
	Provide a range of seating options – different people may seek different fabrics.

10. Final message

We hope you have found this resource useful. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact: Caroline Robinson, Senior Occupational Therapist, Provider Quality Team, Essex County Council. email: caroline.robinson3@essex.gov.uk

"While no one can change the outcome of dementia or Alzheimer's, with the right support you can change the journey." - Tara Reed