

• DEMENTIA FRIENDLY HOMES FACTSHEET

Dementia specific adaptations

Decorating

Retro decoration is a relatively new but simple way of helping people with dementia feel more comfortable in their home surroundings and which may help to maintain independence and capacity for longer than might otherwise be the case.

With dementia short term memory may become poor, but longer term memories can remain strong. Someone with dementia may start to feel more comfortable with items that were familiar to them earlier in their lives. Instead of just reminiscing over these things, retro-decorating involves putting familiar items back in the home - and using them. Going back to using what was once familiar seems to be helping people to remain at home for longer, and also feel happier and more confident about doing so.

For example, a cordless or mobile phone replaced by a telephone that has push buttons or a dial. Using these items can also help to remind people what to do with them – so using the sort of telephone you had years ago may be enough of a trigger to mean you carry on making calls. If in earlier days you or someone else with dementia used to cook whilst listening to the radio, replacing the current model with an older style-looking radio in the kitchen can help that person recall making meals and start successfully cooking simple dishes again.

Listening to the type of music you remember best can help trigger all sorts of memories about what to do (as well as being enjoyable).

Colour Contrast

A simple measure that helps people with dementia continue to find their way around their home and remember what things are meant to be used for, is use of contrasting colours. For example, a bed made up with linen in a clearly contrasting colour from the rest of the room makes it easier to see where the bed is and can be a reminder about what it is for. So a bed with dark blue covers in a room with cream carpets and cream walls will stand out, whereas a bed with cream covers in the same room won't.

Using blocks of plain colour rather than patterns also helps make the distinction clearer. The same principle applies throughout the home. In the bathroom, contrasting colours for toilet seats (such as a black or dark wooden seat on a white toilet against a white wall), and coloured handrails can make a big difference to using the bathroom safely and hygienically. Something as simple as using a bar of soap that is a contrasting colour to the basin or bath can make washing easier. You can apply the retro decorating for dementia principles here too – for example, the smell of distinctively scented Pears soap (if that's what you remember using in the past), may remind you to wash your hands.

At the dining room or kitchen table, using contrasting colours for crockery, cutlery and familiar tableware can provide clear signals about meals and prolong capacity for eating independently. Floor coverings are important when it comes to moving around the home as they can be a 'way-finding' feature helping to trigger memory. Simple, plain colour contrast is best. Patterned floor coverings can cause confusion eg. lines in patterned carpets might be perceived as changes of level or steps. Glossy finishes on floors can create confusing reflections, so plain matt finishes are preferable. Colour contrast for anything that you need to locate – doors, light switches, sockets, door handles – can all be useful in enabling you to find your way around more easily.

Layout of rooms

Arranging the furniture to make it easier to move round the room, creating clear and obvious 'passages' for getting from one side of the room to the other or reaching doors can all help to make movement safer.

Placing chairs so that you can look out of the window, or watch people who are doing things inside and outside the home, can help to maintain social and sensory stimulation.

As dementia progresses, seeing reflections in a mirror, including your own reflection which you don't recognise, can become increasingly confusing. Covering or removing mirrors can help. Laying out rooms with clearly visible memorabilia and objects which act as memory stimulants has also been shown to be beneficial.

Making your home as open plan as possible, enabling visibility from one room to another, even something as radical as removing doors, can help you to navigate your way around. A group of closed, identical doors, e.g. in a hallway, can cause distress and disorientation.

Visibility

Make sure things are easy to see instead of having to remember where they are. Ideas include fitting glass-fronted doors to kitchen cupboards, installing ovens and fridges with clear doors, and keeping food in see through containers.

Keep surfaces (such as in the kitchen or on tables) as clear as possible, with just the essentials on display. For example, in the kitchen put away the racks of herbs and spices which are used only infrequently, and leave out the kettle, tea, coffee and sugar, a couple of mugs and teaspoons.

Consider using open fronted storage throughout the home eg. open shelves or clear door cupboards and wardrobes.

Entrances

Sensors can also be used to tell if the front door has been left open. There are devices that activate a reminder message whenever someone with dementia enters or leaves the home. The message

(which can be personally recorded, so it can be the voice of someone familiar) can be used to remind the person to pick up their keys or lock the front door. Or the message might tell them not to go out at night, or remind them about appointments.

Other modifications

Stirling University (<http://www.dementia.stir.ac.uk/housing/design-housing>) has compiled a list of additional useful home modifications to help people with dementia to live at home.