

## Dementia - safety issues

Dementia affects each person differently. Symptoms such as confusion, memory loss and disorientation are common, while limited mobility and coordination are additional factors that may affect safety. It is important that family, friends and health professionals assist the person with dementia to feel and be as secure as possible.

### Safety in the home

The best living environment for a person with dementia is one that assists them to be as happy and independent as possible. Familiarity is important for a person with dementia. The home environment should help them know where they are and find where they want to go. Changes in the environment may add to confusion and disorientation.

Some tips for making the home a safe environment for the person with dementia include:

- Arrange furniture simply and consistently, and keep the environment uncluttered.
- Remove loose rugs and seal up carpet edges that may be safety hazards.
- Night-lights in the hallways and in the toilet may be useful to assist a person to find their way to the bathroom at night.
- Dispose of, or safely store, all old medications and hazardous materials such as kerosene.
- Electric blankets and hot water bottles can be a safety hazard for a person with dementia and are better removed.
- Automatic cut-off mechanisms for hot water jugs and other appliances are recommended.
- Replace more dangerous forms of heating, such as bar radiators, with safer heating options such as column heaters.
- Check appliances, such as heaters and toasters, to make sure they do not present any safety hazards.
- Replace long electrical cords on appliances with coiled or retractable cords.
- Thermostats are available to control the level of heat that comes out of the hot water taps.
- Smoke detectors are important for everyone. A person with dementia may need someone else to check the battery and make sure the alarm is loud enough.

### Safety outside the home

Some people with dementia may become disoriented and get lost in unfamiliar, or even previously familiar, surroundings. It is important that they carry appropriate identification at all times, including their name and address and an emergency contact number. An identity bracelet is ideal.

Some tips for making the area outside the home safe for the person with dementia include:

- Keep paths well swept and clear of overhanging branches.
- Check catches on gates.
- Remove poisonous plants and dispose of hazardous substances from sheds and garages.

### Safety checklist

It may be useful to go through the house, room by room, to assess for any safety hazards. The following checklist can assist you to remove hazards and make the home a safer environment.

#### Access to the home

- Steps

- Paths.

### **House – living area**

- Chair heights
- Protruding furniture.

### **House – general**

- Is the house cluttered?
- Is lighting adequate?
- Are floor coverings non-slip?
- Check doors, windows and heating.

### **House – kitchen**

- Floor
- Flammable materials
- Taps
- Electrical and gas equipment
- Kettle
- Poisons
- Cupboards
- Drainage in floor
- Electrical connections – are they away from possible contact with water or heating sources?

### **House – bathroom**

- Floor
- Hot water thermostat control
- Storage of poisons
- Toilet height
- Toilet paper – is it visible?

### **House – laundry**

- Storage of poisons
- Drainage in floor
- Electrical connections – are they away from possible contact with water.

### **House – bedroom**

- Bed height
- Chair in bedroom for dressing.

## **Wandering**

As well as making the home safer, it is important to ensure the person with dementia is as safe as possible if they go outside the home. Some things to check include:

- Identification bracelet
- Identification and emergency contact number in wallet
- Bell on door, window and gate.

## **Some aids may help**

Aids to independence and safety include:

- Hand-held shower hoses allow a person to direct the flow of water as desired.
- A shower chair or bath seat allows a person to be seated while bathing and eliminates the need to lower oneself into the bath.
- Rails at bath, shower and toilet provide support and balance.
- Easy-to-read clocks and large calendars will help to orient to date and time.
- Reminder timers can also be helpful.
- Heat sensors or alarms may help in case of emergency.
- A list of contact names and numbers in large print placed by the telephone allows the person to more easily stay connected.

Independent Living Centres in each Australian state and territory offer a number of services designed to promote safe living. Information is available on a number of products including smoke detectors, hot water service temperature regulators and monitoring services. Advice is also available on home modifications and home design.

## Where to get help

- Alzheimer's Australia National Dementia Helpline Tel. 1800 100 500
- Independent Living Centres in each state and territory Tel. (03) 9362 6111 or 1300 885 886 [www.ilcaustralia.org.au](http://www.ilcaustralia.org.au)

## Things to remember

- Dementia affects each person differently.
- Safety may be affected by symptoms (such as confusion, memory loss and disorientation), limited mobility and coordination, or by changes in the environment.
- Family, friends and health professionals can help the person with dementia feel safe and be as secure as possible.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Alzheimer's Australia Victoria

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