

Creating a Safe Home for People with Dementia

When assisting a person with dementia to live safely in their home, caregivers balance their desire for the person to remain as independent as possible with their wish to provide an environment that is safe and secure.

People with dementia may start to experience changes that can impact their ability to live safely. Indicators of this include changes in:

- ability to make good decisions
- ability to recognize once familiar places and objects
- physical mobility
- ability to interpret messages from the senses

Four important steps to increase the safety of a person with dementia are:

1. Assess your home for possible risks and hazards.
2. Focus your efforts on adapting the living area rather than teaching the person new skills.
3. Support the person's abilities while accommodating changes in their skills.
4. Choose changes that assist the person without severely disrupting your home.

All Canadians who are concerned about living safely are encouraged to check their homes to be sure that risks that might lead to falls are minimized and that general safety practices are carried out. Family and friends who support a person with dementia need to consider a number of additional safety suggestions.

The following are some tips for increasing safety in the home of a person with dementia:

Living Areas

- Place commonly used items in plain view at strategic locations.
- Install deadbolts or other locking systems. Place added locks away from the person's normal range of vision.
- Remove poisonous plants that a person might mistake as food.
- Apply eye level decals to windows or sliding glass doors that a person might bump into.
- Replace mirrors with pictures of familiar people and places.
- Clear walking areas of extra furnishings or clutter.
- Leave doors to rooms open so that the person can see the room or place identifiable signs on closed doors.
- Use contrasting colours so that furnishings can be distinguished from their surroundings.
- Avoid black mats or rugs.
- Mark the edge of stair treads to distinguish changes in plane.
- Remove alcohol from sight or lock liquor cabinets.
- Secure guns in locked cabinets or remove them from the premises.
- Install and regularly test smoke and carbon monoxide monitors.

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Kitchen

- Remove or lock away cleaning supplies.
- Turn off electricity to the garburator.
- Remove knives and other sharp objects.
- Turn off the stove at the electrical panel.
- Label drawers and cabinets, noting contents.
- Add locks to drawers and cabinets that could contain unsafe items.
- Clear countertops and tables of excess clutter.
- Check refrigerator to assure that stored foods are fresh and safe.
- Use appliances (kettles, toasters) with automatic shut-offs.

Bathroom

- Set water heater temperature to 48°C or less.
- Supervise the use of electrical care appliances.
- Remove locks from the bathroom door.
- Move prescription and non-prescription medications from the medicine chest and secure them in a locked area.
- Store liquids such as shampoo and hand lotion outside of the bathroom or in locked cupboards.
- Increase lighting and add signage so that the fixtures are easily found.
- Mark the toilet seat with coloured tape so that it contrasts with the wall and floor.
- Remove trash cans if the person confuses them for the toilet.
- Replace carpeting with vinyl flooring.

Bedroom

- Avoid use of electric blankets and heating pads if the person is incontinent.
- Add night lights along the path to the bathroom.
- Lower the bed to lessen the chance of a person falling out of bed.

Outdoors

- Be with the person when they are doing outdoor activities.
- Lock fence gates.
- Place pesticides, paints and other hazardous materials in a secured cupboard.
- When the person is no longer driving, keep car keys in an inaccessible place.
- Alert neighbours to be watchful if the person leaves home dressed inappropriately for the weather. Register the person with dementia with MedicAlert® Safely Home®. Call 1-855-581-3794.

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The Alzheimer Society of Manitoba's mission is to alleviate the individual, family and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders while supporting the search for a cure.