

How to make it a Home Sweet Home

As people living with dementia become more cognitively impaired, they become very dependent on the environment and others to support them.

Excessive stimulation or lack of structure can affect a person's behavior and level of functioning. At the same time, they may also have increasing problems with negotiating their surroundings. Even people who have lived in the same house for years may get lost in their own homes. Finding the right door to the bathroom in the middle of the night, walking around crowded rooms with excessive furniture, locating a light switch – are challenges that become potential causes for accidents, falls, injuries, confusion and frustration.

Many dementia care facilities have learned the importance of customizing the environment to minimize confusion and promote a sense of security for their residents. Most modern facilities are already designed with the needs of the memory impaired in mind, featuring soothing colors, special lighting, visually enhanced doors and walls, and clear pathways.

If you are caring for your loved one at home, there are



some modifications that can be incorporated into any space to promote familiarity and security for those with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Rita Altman, National Director of Memory Care Services for Sunrise Senior Living, has some great suggestions:

“Create a Personalized Environment. A space that feels like home and is personalized with photos, mementos and other familiar items will help your loved one keep their sense of identity and belonging. Use a former hobby or passion as the theme for the room and decorate in your loved one's favorite colors.

Use Proper Lighting. Natural light not only helps for vision and well-being, but also helps keep sleep cycles intact. Install motion sensor

lights in bedrooms or bathrooms to promote independence and safety.

Contrast Colors. Color contrasts between furniture, fixtures, walls and floors help people with dementia differentiate between different surfaces in order to safely navigate their home. For instance, contrast bed linens and drapes with walls and flooring. In the bathroom, use colored towels that contrast with the bathroom walls.

Reconfigure Furniture. Couches and chairs should be soft and comfortable with solid colors. They should have fabrics that consider continence issues and are easy to clean. Furniture should also be positioned to encourage engagement with others or

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Caregiver Tips**Home Safety**

- 💡 Lock or disguise hazardous areas.
- 💡 Install door locks out of sight.
- 💡 Use safety devices, such as childproof locks and door knobs.
- 💡 Add extra lighting in entries, areas between rooms, stairways, and bathrooms.
- 💡 Diffuse bright light by removing mirrors and glass-top furniture.
- 💡 Install walk-in showers, grab bars, and non-skid decals on slippery surfaces.
- 💡 Move items such as floor lamps and coffee tables to create safe areas to wander.
- 💡 Regularly clean out the refrigerator and discard inedible food.
- 💡 Regularly check fire extinguishers and smoke alarms.
- 💡 Keep a list of emergency numbers and addresses by every phone, as well as a list of all prescriptions and dosages.

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face outdoors. Avoid simply positioning furniture in front of a television.

Avoid Busy Patterns. Rugs and furniture should not be highly patterned or have strongly contrasting colors because some with memory loss have trouble with spatial awareness and can perceive darkly contrasting patterns as holes or perceive flecks of color as spots that need to be removed.

Avoid Scatter Rugs. Scatter rugs should be kept at a minimum because they can cause confusion and pose a risk for tripping. If necessary, they should always be non-slip.

Consider Shadow Boxes as Art. Shadow boxes are a great way to help personalize a space and spark reminiscent conversations. They can be hung outside the door to give those with memory loss a visual cue to help them recognize their room.

Use Colored Dinnerware. *Fiestaware* is a great brand to use because it has bright, solid color with no distracting patterns. A bright yellow color contrasts well with most foods which makes it easier for those with memory loss to distinguish where food ends and the dish begins. Saucers should also be used with cups, as their wide lips can hold food for seniors who are prone to wandering while they eat or drink.”

Modifying the home to minimize confusion and promote comfort, can sometimes help reduce some behaviors and agitation.

Structural modifications to promote safety should also be considered (hand-bars in showers, leveling unnecessary steps, replacing uneven floors, etc.) There are an increasing numbers of contractors who specialize in building safety features for the elderly and memory impaired.

Written by Luciana Cramer, Care Consultant, Santa Barbara Chapter Office.



For more information on home safety:

The National Institute on Aging has numerous resources and publications on Alzheimer's disease and dementia. For their booklet, *Home Safety for People with Alzheimer's Disease*, visit: www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/homesafety.htm

Visit the Safety Center at the Alzheimer's Association website at alz.org under "We Can Help" to learn more about safety concerns and solutions. www.alz.org/safetycenter

Your local Alzheimer's Association Office also has numerous books, videos, and handouts available for you to borrow from our library.

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