



Assistive Technology

Help Sheet 1.2

Living with dementia - how the environment, technology and you can help

There are many challenges people living with dementia can face, whether living alone or with a carer. This help sheet provides information on assistive technology and how it may be used to support the independence of people living with dementia. While assistive technology will never be the sole answer to maximizing quality of life for people with dementia, it can play an important support role and may delay or prevent a person from moving from home if they so choose.

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology is a broad term used to describe any item or object which enables a person with a disability to perform a task that they would otherwise be unable to do.

The types of assistive technology available and how they can be used to support someone living with dementia vary greatly. There are “low tech” and simple stand alone items such as a calendar clock which can help with orienting someone to the time of the day, the day of the week, the month and year. There is also more advanced technology, such as automated home systems, that manages lighting, temperature and safety features in the home.

Telecare is a type of assistive technology that is used to provide support from a distance. This support is usually from a call centre and can be used to monitor the person’s health status for falls, existing conditions, or check whether household appliances have been left on. If difficulty is detected, a call is automatically placed to the call centre who will then notify the nominated carer.

How Can Assistive Technology Help?

One of the benefits of using assistive technology is that it can provide an opportunity for a person with dementia to increase their self-reliance and independence. This can then lead to improved confidence and self esteem.

Reducing the amount of assistance needed by a person with dementia can mean ‘peace of mind’ for the carer and has the potential to free up some of their time. Some of the areas where assistive technology may help include:

- Sleep disturbances;
- Safe use of domestic appliances;
- Managing medication;
- Orienting to the time, day of the week, month or year;
- Finding your way or safe walking/wandering;
- Summoning help in an emergency; and
- Locating misplaced items.



Wireless Item Locator is a colour coded electronic system that allows items such as keys to be located

Who Can Be Involved?

It is critical that any decision to change the environment or use technology follows a person-centred assessment, where the perspectives, needs and choices of the person with dementia are understood and respected.

Many of the stand alone/simple products and modifications to the environment can be set up without professional help. Some types of assistive technology and home modifications, such as the installation of grab rails can require the involvement of a health professional, such as an occupational therapist, to advise on whether the technology will be suitable or not.

Qualified persons such as electricians, plumbers, gas fitters, information technology specialists and builders may also be required for installation of the technology depending on what types of assistive technology are to be used in the home.

Personal Approach

Assistive technology should not be used to replace human contact. People have different needs and respond to both the environment and other people around them in different ways. What works for some people does not always work for others.

Assistive technology has the potential to have both a positive or negative impact on the individual.

When considering assistive technology it is important to keep in mind how the person with dementia relates to their environment, what is important to them, their perspective, how they relate to others and how important these relationships are to them.

The Ethical Use of Assistive Technology

The development of assistive technology is advancing at a rapid rate and there are now an increasing number of devices available that can be used to assist the person living with dementia. It is important to consider the statement “one size does not fit all”. If the device or system used does not meet the needs of the person it may not work and may even create confusion or distress.

It is important to consider the following:

- Does this device make a task more complicated?
- Does it restrict the person’s freedom?
- Does it take away the opportunity for the person to take part in activities?
- Does the person have the capacity to make informed consent?

Keeping It Simple

Some of the symptoms of dementia can mean people find even their own long term home environment unfamiliar, unsettling and difficult to make sense of and function in. The need for familiarity is important, so it is vital to only change what needs changing.



Finding Products

For information about specific products and where to get them, see www.dementiatechnology.org.au Professional assessment is advised before any changes are made or products purchased. To find the best solution for your needs and to avoid unnecessary expense, contact the Independent Living Centre.

Further Information

Technology and the way individuals relate to it are constantly changing. For further information, a dementia friendly home checklist and to view other Help Sheets about how the environment, technology and you can help, please see www.dementiatechnology.org.au or call 1300 275 227 (1300 ASK BCS).

For further information and to discuss your individual needs and:

- assistive technology or home modifications, contact the Independent Living Centre at www.ilcaustralia.org or 1300 885 886;
- dementia, contact The National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500, or Alzheimer’s Australia at www.alzheimers.org.au.

For information about local care and support services, including respite for carers, phone Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres on freecall 1800 052 222*. For emergency respite support outside business hours, phone freecall 1800 059 059* (*Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates).