



# Environment

## Help Sheet 1.3

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

This help sheet provides information on how assistive technology and environmental adaptation may be used to support the independence, safety and security and quality of life of people living at home with dementia.

#### **Person Centred Response**

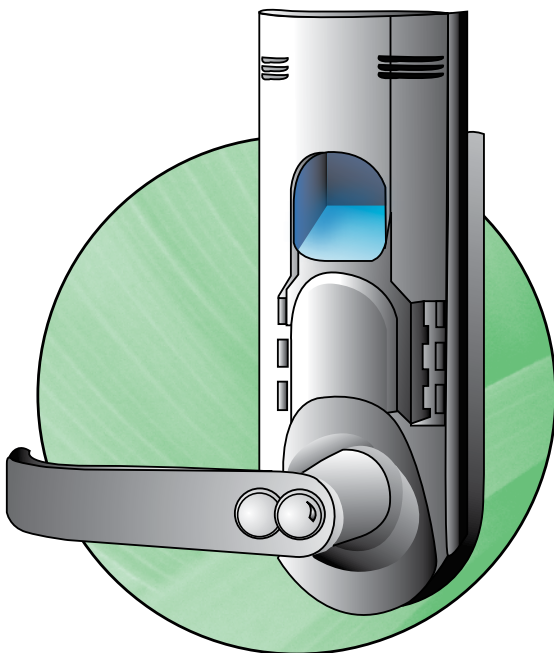
A person living with dementia will experience changes in their ability to interact with other people and their environment over time.

Any decision to change the environment or use technology must follow a person-centred assessment, where the perspectives, needs and choices of the person with dementia are understood and respected.

What works for some people does not always work for others. It is important to continue to provide ongoing evaluation to ensure that any technology or strategies used for supporting independence and safety in the home, remains meaningful to the person and match their needs and abilities.

#### **Suggestions**

- Have a set place for regularly used items to make them easier to find them later.
- Minimise clutter (if acceptable to the person with dementia) to reduce the visual and physical overload of the environment.
- Move regularly used items to a level between shoulder and hip height to bring the items into field of vision, thus making them easier to see and reach.
- To reduce the risk of a person with dementia walking into glass doors, place bright stickers below eye level on the doors.
- If seeing their own or others' reflections in mirrors is distressing to a person with dementia, remove or cover all mirrors.
- Use a handheld shower and shower stool or chair. The handheld shower allows the water flow to be directed away from the face and head. The hose assists with reaching the back and lower body areas and can be less threatening. A shower chair can provide support and stability thus reducing fatigue. Grab rails (not towel rails) can provide support when standing in the shower or using the toilet. Occupational therapists working in community health settings can visit your home and talk to you about your needs.
- **Mag Lock** is a discreet magnetic lock system which can be used on drawers and cupboards in the kitchen or anywhere in



**Keyless Door Lock** is a lock allowing you to open your door with your fingerprint

the home. It was designed to be invisible with the locking component fitted to the inside of the cupboard or drawer. The magnetic key operates the lock from outside the drawer. It can be installed on, and will work with, wood, plastics, laminates and ceramic tiles. The lock does not draw attention to the fact that the drawer or cupboard is locked. This lock supports safety, privacy and dignity.

- **Safety and Security Window Film** bonds to glass. It is resistant to tearing or penetration and is suitable for windows, glass doors and shower screens. This is a useful product for older homes that do not have safety glass. An adhesive is used to bond the safety film to the glass and the film usually needs to be installed by a licensed installer.
- **Sheer Net Curtains** reduce both day-time and night-time glare and reflections which can be distressing for the person with dementia. Reflections in the glass can be misinterpreted as a stranger in the home or that the person is in an unfamiliar environment.
- **Lounge or Armchair Armrests** – the height of the seat, the depth and the firmness of the cushions of the lounge or armchair can make it easier for someone to safely manage moving from sitting down to standing up. For someone with vision impairment or perception problems plain colours that contrast between the walls, curtains and flooring can make the chair easier to locate in a ‘busy’ or ‘cluttered’ environment.
- **Keyless Door Lock** – fitted to the front or back door, it is used in place of a standard door lock. This lock allows you to open your door with your fingerprint. A fingerprint lock removes the need

for you to use or find the front door keys. This door lock has the capacity for recognising and accepting other fingerprints once they have been programmed in to allow family members access. Be aware that this type of locking system is recent technology and may represent an unfamiliar concept to many older people.

- **Hand Rails** provide support for mobility and safety for those using stairs or a ramp. Contrasting the colour of the rails with the surroundings can make it easier for individuals with vision or perception difficulties to locate the rails.
- **Barn Door** – fitting a barn door can be useful as a barrier for a person with dementia if they have difficulty recognizing unsafe situations such as wandering into the kitchen at busy times. The door prevents entry but still enables them to see what their loved one or carer is doing. A barn door is divided so that the top half of the door can be open while the lower half remains closed.
- **Painting and Colour** – using matt paint instead of gloss can reduce the incidence of reflected glare which can be disturbing for people with vision impairment and those with dementia. Reflected light and glare can make it difficult to see environmental cues that we use to help us to find our way. The use of colour to contrast or highlight key locations in the home can make it easier for individuals with vision or perception difficulties. Alternatively, colours can be used as a method of disguising or blending in areas of the home that may be unsafe and that you wish to divert attention away from.



### Finding Products

For information about specific products and where to get them, see [www.dementiatechnology.org.au](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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).