



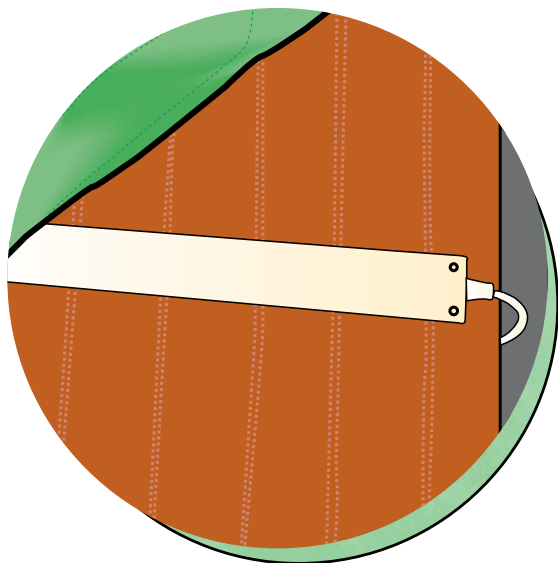
Falls

Help Sheet 2.2

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

A fall can be frightening and dangerous. This help sheet provides information on how assistive technology and environmental adaptation may be used to support the independence of people living at home with dementia and help reduce the risk of falling.

For someone with dementia living at home there can be a number of risk factors associated with falls. Conditions such as strokes, Parkinson's disease, vision impairment and Lewy Body disease, which affect a person's mobility, can increase a person's risk of falling. Poor lighting, uneven flooring, footwear that does not fit, not taking medication correctly, side effects from some medications, urinary incontinence, poor nutrition and difficulty with recognizing changes in depth of flooring or outdoor surfaces can also increase a person's risk of falling.



Chair/Bed Occupancy Sensors are placed under a chair pad, or on top of a mattress, and are linked to a control unit which communicates to a call centre

Person Centred Response

All of us have different needs and respond to both the environment and other people around us in different ways. 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.

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.

Warning Signs

Indicators that a person is falling or at risk of falling include when the person:

- Has bruising and abrasions from walking into furniture;
- Grabs onto backs of chairs and furniture or uses fittings (door handles, light switches) as they move about their home;
- Has difficulty moving from sitting to standing or vice versa;
- Has difficulty managing a change in floor height (one step or multiple steps);
- Has to reach above chest height to obtain everyday items;
- Complains of dizziness when standing or turning their head;
- Forgets to use walking aids and equipment;
- Stops or falters at changes in flooring, eg linoleum, or tiles, to carpet, or where there is a pattern on the floor.

Environmental Suggestions

Sometimes simple environmental changes such as wearing suitable footwear, removing mats, changing the lighting, reducing the amount of clutter or highlighting steps and door entries can reduce the risk of falling. Familiarity is important, so only change what really needs changing.

- **Lighting** – low light levels, shadows and glare can make it difficult for someone to find their way or recognise trip and fall hazards. Please refer to the Lighting help sheet for further information.
- **Furniture** – the height and design of furniture are important. Are there arm rests to push up from? How firm is the seat or mattress? How deep is the seat? These factors can make a difference to how a person can safely manage moving from sitting to standing up and vice versa.
- **Rails** – a properly installed grab rail (not a towel rail) beside the toilet, bath or in the shower recess can provide a stable support surface to assist with transfers. Rails on stairs can also assist with independence.
- **Everyday items** that are in regular use should be within easy reach to prevent over reaching.

Advanced Technology Suggestions

- **Personal Emergency Response Alarms** are lightweight, waterproof and worn around the neck or on the wrist. If the person falls and needs assistance, they press a button on their pendant activating a speaker unit which dials a 24 hour support call centre. This system is useful for the early stages of dementia where the wearer is able to recognise their need for help and activate the pendant.
- **Chair or Bed Occupancy Sensors** placed under a chair pad, or on top of the mattress, are linked to a control unit which communicates with a call centre via the telephone line. The sensors can detect if a person has left their chair or got up during the night and then not returned to their bed (after allowing time for a drink or toilet break). This product works as a stand alone or call centre based system.
- **Automated or Smart Home Systems** can use either wireless or a 'hard wiring' to operate and communicate. These systems operate lights, heating and security. They have the capacity to monitor the use of electrical equipment, water usage and even identify if the water has been left running. The person's movement around their home can be monitored for any unusual changes. Automated Home Systems can be linked to a call centre or family carers only.
- **Telecare** is a home based call centre system, using equipment that monitors the resident's blood pressure, blood sugar levels, peak flow and other measures of health. This information is then uploaded via the set top box to the call centre or GP's rooms for review and action if required.



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).

Simple Technology Suggestions

- **Glow in the Dark Strips** are adhesive strips that can be placed either indoors or outdoors on stairs, handrails or around light switches. They can help a person find a light switch in the dark or direct them down a hallway to the bathroom.
- **A Sensor Light Adaptor** has an infrared sensor to detect movement and switch on the light eg: getting up during the night. It plugs straight into a light socket or lamp fitting and the timer can be adjusted. When choosing the wattage of the bulb, be mindful that sudden changes from dark to very bright light can take a number of minutes to adjust to and if too bright can be a falls hazard.
- **Night Lights with Sensors** are small lights that plug directly into a power point. The night light automatically switches on in the evening and off in the morning.