



# Finding Things, Prompts and Reminders

## Help Sheet 2.3

*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 of people living at home with dementia and assist with finding things in their home.

The frustration associated with locating items that are frequently misplaced can exacerbate anxiety and frustration for both those with memory loss and their carers.



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

### **Person Centred Response**

When considering changes or technology in the home it is important to consider that simple strategies can often work just as well as more complex technology. Involving a person with dementia in the decision making process is important. Changes that may not be suitable initially may work after a number of months, so it is important to continually review strategies.

### **Environmental Suggestions**

- Minimising clutter can make it much easier to find items. For example, only have seasonally appropriate clothing in the wardrobe.
- Having a set place for items that the person with dementia regularly uses can make it easier to find them later. Often they have already been using a regular spot in their homes to leave items such as house keys, wallets or handbags. This may be on a sideboard or cabinet near the front door, a bedside table or a desk in the study. The 'Helpful Handbook for Memory Loss' suggests that a row of coat hooks is a useful way of keeping important things together. Contact the Independent Living Centre on 1300 885 886.
- Sometimes placing items between shoulder and hip height can assist by bringing the items into the person's field of vision, thus making it easier for them to see and reach items.
- A glass panel in a cupboard door in the kitchen or bathroom, or removing the cupboard door completely, allows the easy identification of the contents of the cupboard and reduces the need to open all cupboards to search for the item.
- Using colour to contrast or highlight key locations in the home can make it easier to locate cupboards or rooms.

### **Simple Technology Suggestions**

- **Labels or Signs** placed on shelves, cupboards and doors can assist in locating items or finding a room in the house. Signs and labels need to be clear. Letters should be large with a strong

contrast, for example black writing on a white background. Signs can also have a picture of the items inside the cupboard. Placement of signs is important. A sign that is placed too high will not be noticed by a person who is stooped.

As dementia progresses the tendency is to look downwards. Signs that are laminated or painted with gloss paint are unlikely to be noticed because of the glare reflected from them. Low glare laminate is available from most office supply stores.

There are cue cards available in multiple community languages from Eastern Health in Victoria. These cards were developed by their Transcultural Services in Victoria with the aim of assisting both health professionals and carers in communicating with clients. They are not intended to replace the services of an interpreter. Many of these cards may assist with labelling rooms in and around the home [www.easternhealth.org.au/index.html](http://www.easternhealth.org.au/index.html).

- **Clear Storage Containers** used in the kitchen or bathroom work in the same way as glass panels in cupboards, allowing the contents to be viewed easily. This can reduce the frustration of sorting through cupboards and removing lids of containers to see what is inside.
- Similarly, a **Shallow Depth Fridge** can allow contents to be viewed easily.
- **Wireless Key/Item Locator** – a set of four locators, each key-ring sized and a different colour. They can be attached to any item or object that a key ring can be attached to, or by using double-sided adhesive Velcro. The receiver has four different coloured buttons which match the colour of the key rings. When the button is pressed the receiver sends a wireless signal to the

locator setting off a beeping sound. The signal works between 1 metre and 10 metres. Wireless item locators are available from selected electronic stores.

- **‘Doorganiser’** is a canvas wallet designed to hang from a door handle. It has open pockets and a clip to hold easily forgotten items such as glasses, keys, mobile phones or envelopes. This product is available in a number of different colours.
- **Memory Jogging Devices** can record multiple messages/memory prompts and play them back at defined times of the day. They may be useful for appointment, meal time or medication prompting.
- **Mobile Phones** – using the record and playback option on a mobile phone, stating where the car has been parked may assist with finding the car in a busy car park when it is time to leave.
- **‘Talking Label’** is a reusable magnetic cap that is the size of a tin can. It is able to record a 10 second voice message that identifies the contents of the container.

### **Advanced Technology Suggestions**

- **Keyless Door Lock (Biometric Fingerprint Door Lock)** – fitted to the front or back door, it is used in place of a standard door lock. This lock allows the person with dementia to open their door using their fingerprint. A fingerprint lock removes the need 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, allowing family members access. This type of locking system is a recent development and may represent an unfamiliar concept to some people.



### **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).