



Dining Room

Help Sheet 3.3

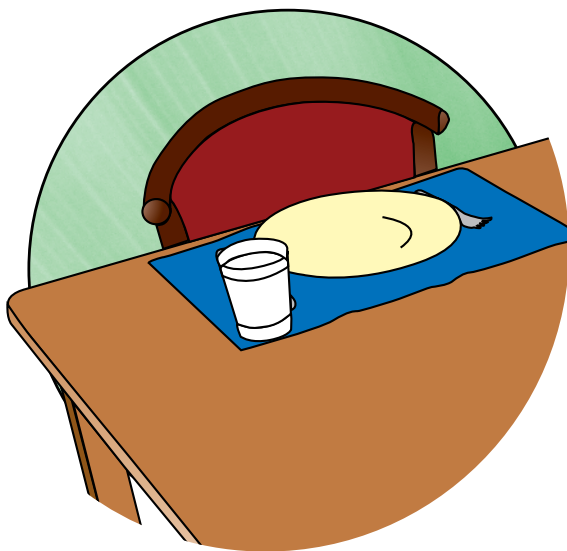
Living with dementia - how the environment, technology and you can help

This help sheet provides ideas on how changes in the environment and some items of assistive technology may be used in the dining room of the family home to support the independence, safety and security of a person living with dementia.

Some common issues a person with dementia may experience that are associated with the dining area may include:

- Difficulty getting in and out of chairs;
- Difficulty with using eating utensils;
- Recognising food or changes in appetite.

A dining area that is familiar to the person with dementia and is similar to their past environment will provide the most support in maintaining independence.



A contrasting table setting makes it much easier to locate the white plate on the blue placemat

Person Centred Response

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

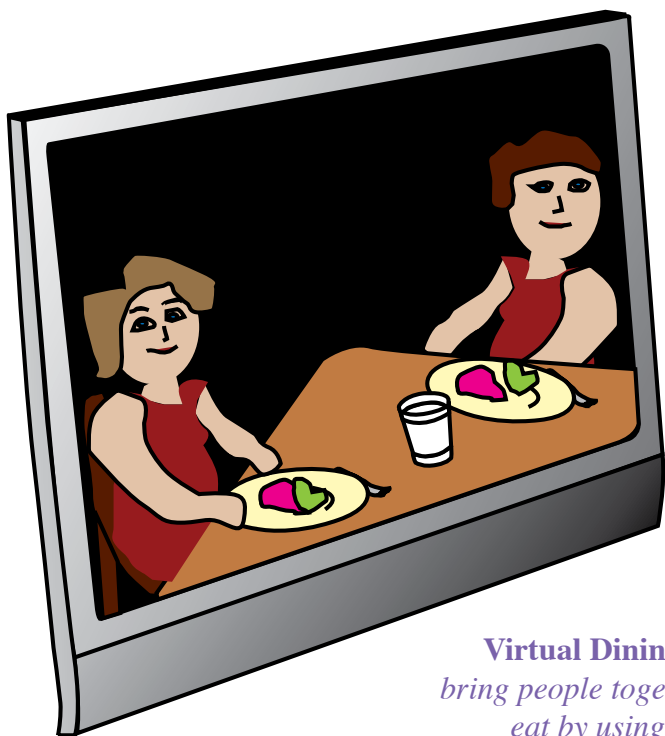
What works for some people does not always work for others. It is important to continue to provide ongoing evaluation to ensure that any technology or strategies used for supporting independence and safety in the home remain meaningful to the person and match their needs and abilities.

Environmental Suggestions

- **Table** – a square, rather than a round, dining table provides added cues for seating and eating space for those who have difficulty recognising spatial boundaries. A table surface that is dull, so as to not reflect bright light or glare, can assist with locating items on the table.
- **Plastic guards** placed on each corner of the table are designed to prevent accidental injuries caused by walking into, or knocking against, the sharp corners of furniture. These guards are available from most hardware stores.
- **Seating** – dining chairs with armrests provide support when sitting down and getting up from the table. The person should be able to rest their feet flat on the floor while sitting comfortably in the seat.
- **Table settings using colour contrast** can assist with locating and identifying food, drinks and eating utensils on the table:
 - A white plate or bowl placed on a dark placemat which is contrasted against a light coloured table;
 - Light coloured cutlery which contrasts with the darker place mat; and
 - A non-slip double sided rubber place mat in a contrasting colour can be used to provide contrast and stability.

Simple Technology Suggestions

- **Drinking** – a drinking straw is available which has a one way valve. This prevents any liquid in the straw from running back into the glass or cup when the person stops sipping from the straw.
- **Nutrition** – a nutritional supplement drink is helpful for providing the right balance of vitamins and minerals. The right drink can support weight gain. These drinks can be recommended by a dietician or the person's local GP.
- **Cutlery** – the 'Knork' is a weighted fork which has been designed specifically to cut food without cutting the inside of the person's mouth and is a familiar item to many people.
- **Medication** – the 'Webster Pack' is a blister pack labeled with each day of the week and is filled by your local pharmacist, according to the doctor's prescriptions. This is available in other languages and for those with low vision.



Virtual Dining uses technology to bring people together to socialise and eat by using a video camera link

Advanced Technology Suggestions

- **Medication** – the 'Careousel Automated Medication Dispenser' is a lightweight circular unit which alerts the user with a flashing light or alarm when their medication is due. It dispenses the medication by moving the internal compartment around to the opening. This unit is lockable and has the capacity for 28 different settings in a day.
- **Sensors** – a chair occupancy sensor placed under the chair pad can alert the carer if the person leaves their chair. This can be useful if the person with dementia may be at risk of falls.
- **Virtual dining** – technology companies are developing systems where people eat together using a video camera link. This reduces isolation and also enables family members to provide support and prompting even though they may live far away.



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).