



Kitchen

Help Sheet 3.6

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 in the kitchen to support the independence, safety and security of people living at home with dementia.

Appliances used in the kitchen, such as the stove, toaster and microwave oven, have the potential to cause harm if not used in the manner intended. Serious injury or death can occur as a result of electrocution or fire. Cleaning products and some food products can also be hazardous.



Cupboards with glass panels allow cupboard contents to be seen easily

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.

Environmental Suggestions

There are a number of simple things that can be tried to make the environment more supportive to both the person with dementia and those around them. Only change what needs changing, and keep the kitchen as familiar as possible.

- A **split door or barn style door**, while providing a person with dementia with an opportunity to see you, also assists with preventing access to the kitchen area during busy times; and
- **Labels or signs** on cupboards, or removing cupboard doors, eliminate the need to remember what is in the cupboard.

Simple Technology Suggestions

- **Kettle** – most kettles are now sold with automatic cut off switches that prevent the kettle from boiling dry. Some kettles have the added safety feature of not being able to switch on unless the minimum required water has been added. Retractable or spiral safety cords also reduce the risk of appliance cords on a bench top getting in the way.
- A **Shallow Depth Fridge** may make finding contents in the fridge easier.
- **Oven Guard** – this is a protective cover placed over the oven door to act as a heat barrier and prevent contact burns. These covers can be attached to the oven door with magnets or Velcro

and are constructed from fire resistant material.

- **A Lockable Cabinet** that can be mounted on the wall or placed inside a cupboard out of view is useful for storing household cleaning products that are poisonous. They can be purchased from most larger hardware outlets or homeware stores.

- **Circuit Breakers** provide short circuit and over-current protection. Safety switches monitor the flow of electricity through a circuit and detect a problem which may pose a risk to personal safety and turn the power off. It is worthwhile to review if your home has these installed. If not, your local energy supplier may be able to assist.

- **Appliance Locks** can be used on a microwave oven, fridge, oven, or other household appliances. The locks can be useful if there is a concern that the person with dementia is not able to use household items safely. These products can be self installed and purchased from hardware stores or stores where children's safety products are sold.

- **Velcro Strips** which are double sided and adhesive may be successful in securing appliance doors. For the best results the Velcro should be similar in colour to the product so that it blends. If possible, place the Velcro discreetly to reduce its visibility to the person with dementia.

- **'Mag Lock'** – this discreet magnetic lock system can be used on drawers and cupboards or anywhere in the home. It was designed to be invisible, with the locking component fitted to the inside of the cupboard or drawer, while the magnetic key operates the lock from outside the drawer. It can be installed on wood, plastics, laminates and ceramic tiles and does not draw attention to the fact that the cupboard is locked.

- **Plug-In Gas Alarms** plug directly into the power point and detect escaping gas or unignited gas. The detectors emit an alarm to alert the householder. There are both LPG and Natural Gas alarms available for purchase with instructions for placement of the alarm based on the type of gas in your home.

Advanced Technology Suggestions

- The **Vigil Electric or Gas Stove Isolation System** is a stove isolation system that will automatically switch the stove off after 20 minutes. There is a bypass switch that allows relatives or carers to use the stove for up to two hours. A licensed gas fitter is required for a gas stove fitting and a licensed electrician is recommended for electric stoves.
- **Induction Cook Top** – these cook tops are electronically operated and produce heat only within the cooking utensils and not on the hotplates.
- **Wireless Smoke Detectors** use a base unit linked to a telephone in the home. They are designed to alert the resident and a call centre if smoke is detected.
- **Automated Home Systems** use wireless or 'hard wiring' systems. They can be programmed to operate curtains, lights, heating, and security, as well as monitoring the use of equipment such as the cooker, the fridge and water usage. The system can identify if the cooker has been left on for an extended period, monitor when the resident has left their home or when they have returned. It notifies a carer, or call centre, if there are changes to a person's regular routine that indicate they may be unwell or injured.



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).