

# Adapting home environments for people with dementia

+ Tunstall Technology Guide



**Enhance quality of life and reduce behaviours that happen in dementia by finding the right balance by adapting a home environment to suit the changes in a person with dementia.**

Provide opportunities for more involvement in all daily living activities.

**Give workers the opportunity to be involved in adapting a person's home they are supporting by undertaking these activities with the person with dementia.**

Don't be frightened of asking for physical changes to happen to the person's home giving explanations of why you feel it would work better for the person you are supporting.

**Be sensitive to changes that happen in dementia, what's worked one week may not work the next. Don't be put off by this "get more creative".**

## The Importance of Change

Trying to understand how dementia affects people living at home and how making changes to the home environment can have real positive outcomes for the people they support. Meeting the changing needs of a person with dementia by adapting their home environment can help them in retaining their independence and often manage behaviours that workers may find challenging. People with dementia can experience loss and changes in several areas including:

- Memory
- Hearing, seeing, smell and touch
- How they see objects
- Managing and organising ideas for everyday living
- Behaviour



# Adaptations to the Home

**Loss of memory** can lead to confusion, agitation and a significant loss of independence. Our memory helps us to navigate our way around our environment, recognise night from day, know time and date, have conversations with people and ultimately recognise our home. Your Life Care promotes the person with dementia to retain independence and control over their home environment by reducing the need for the person to ask repeatedly for missing information. The way they do this includes:

**Offering the option of the kitchen cupboards to be glass fronted so people can see easier which can aid understanding.**

**Labelling cupboard and draws, helps a person to know what is contained within it, this reduces the searching that often causes distress.**

**Using wipe boards to map out that particular day. Giving re assurance and visual comfort to help a person with repeated questions of what they are doing that day.**

**Use of laminated pictures or written messages. These are placed around the home for example to navigate a person to the toilet or bedroom. Messages can be left at telephones, on fridges giving specific prompts.**

**Using a memory box or life story book to trigger meaningful conversation.**

**Using clocks which orientate to date, time, month, day or night.**

**Highlighting in a magazine favourite television programmes and having a simplified remote control.**

**Keeping the home calm and reducing the noise around the person you are supporting helps with communicating and the overall wellbeing of the person. Noisy stressed homes impact on people with dementia and their ability to function.**



**Sensory changes** come with age such as hearing and vision changes but at McCarthy & Stone we assess if the person we are supporting has more difficulty in discriminating with colours, contrasts and smell for example. Some of the ways they can help a person manage these difficulties include:

**Suggest clutter is removed or unneeded furniture, so the person has easier movement around their home.**

**Have brighter lighting in hallways and stairs or areas of the home that are used a lot by the person.**

**Discuss having an extra grab rail in bathrooms and bedrooms to reduce the risk of falls.**

**Be mindful of the sun coming through windows and causing shadows and unnecessary glare on objects that could be distracting.**

**If a person is fixated with the front door and the repetitive locking and unlocking of it place a curtain over the door in a similar colour to the walls to reduce the anxiety (this would only be suggested if the person was living with someone else so access in an emergency wasn't hindered).**

**Use the sense of smell to trigger hunger, cook foods which have a strong aroma to stimulate hunger and strong tasting foods stimulate taste buds.**

**We all use touch to comfort, don't be afraid of giving reassurance through touch. Often stroking someone's hand sends a message of calm. Write support plans to include activities that give the opportunity to have this type of contact.**

**Play soft music which the person likes.**

**Behaviour** that may challenge causes major concerns for people with dementia and their carers; it often can result in a person going into a care home. It adversely affects the person with dementia as often how we treat a person who we feel is challenging heightens behaviours and coping mechanisms within us all. Often labels are then attached to people who in hindsight may have been trying to communicate or get information they are missing due to their illness. Research shows that behaviour is the main reason for people going into care homes.

**By adapting a person's home environment frustration and anxiety faced by the person with dementia can be reduced. The environment should be carefully adapted to the changes and losses faced by the person with dementia while preserving memories, experiences, interests and habits that are unique to the person.**



# Adaptations to the Home

## Your Home

### Bathroom



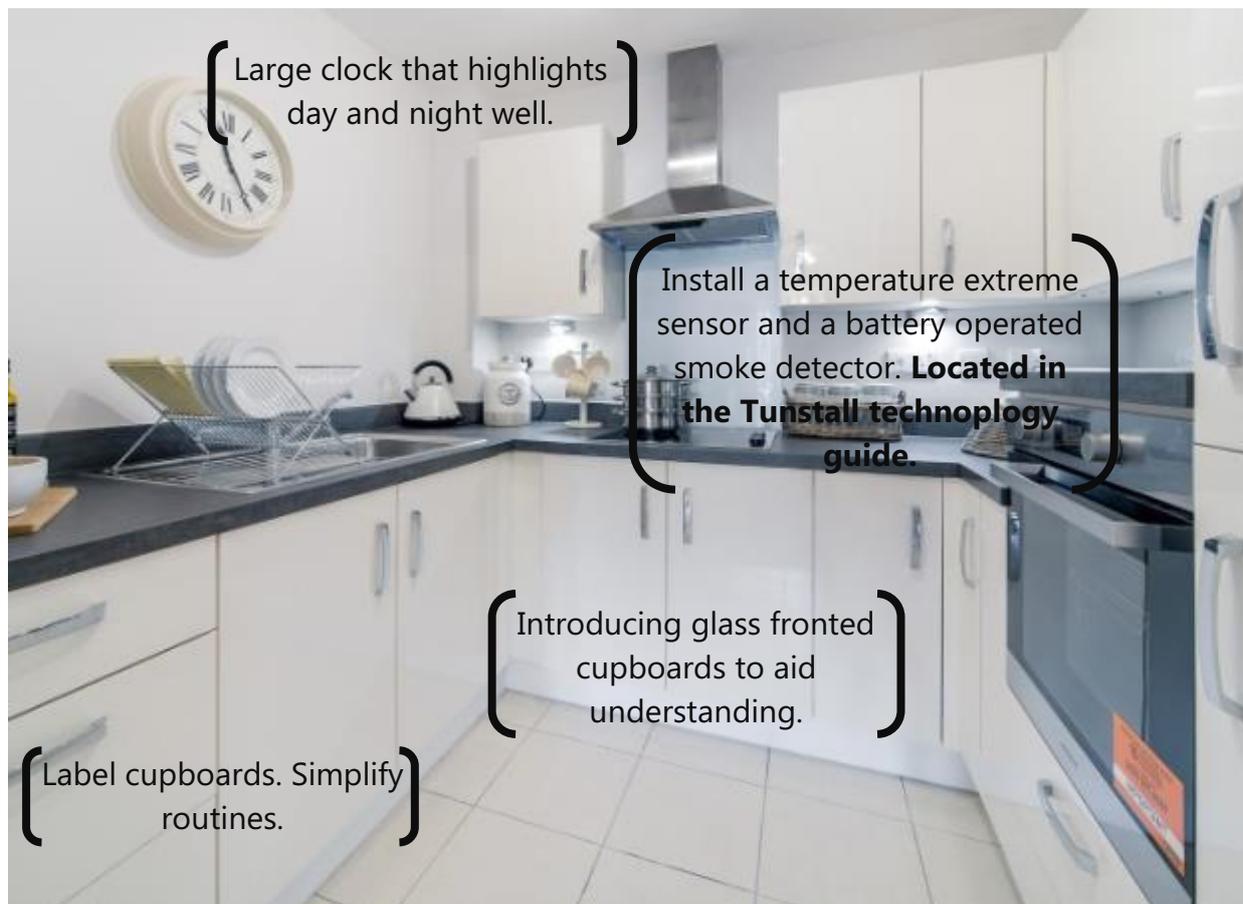
Bathroom doors of a different colour to the doors to other rooms in the house help people identify the bathroom.

**People find grab rails helpful in bathrooms.**

**Signifiers and/or signs can also be used on bathroom doors to allow people to identify the bathroom.**



# Kitchen



Large clock that highlights day and night well.

Install a temperature extreme sensor and a battery operated smoke detector. **Located in the Tunstall technology guide.**

Introducing glass fronted cupboards to aid understanding.

Label cupboards. Simplify routines.

Additional lighting in kitchens helps to make the most of people's sight, e.g. providing strip lights under cabinets and placing additional lighting in fridge and freezer compartments.

It can be helpful to people to make use of contrast in the kitchen. For example, contrasting handles or knobs on cupboard doors and kitchen drawers are more easily identifiable. Contrast can be achieved using colour, e.g. red coloured handles on white kitchen fittings, or a contrasting tone of the same colour, e.g. dark blue handles on pale blue cupboard doors.

**Tactile markings help people to find key temperatures on dials.**



## Lounge Area



Larger LCD screens and print sizes in the lounge area can make life easier.

Lighting of an appropriate intensity supports and promotes independence.

Rugs and mats present potential tripping hazards and removing them can contribute to greater safety in the home.

Meaningful symbols and signifiers used around the home can help people to locate particular rooms and objects more easily.

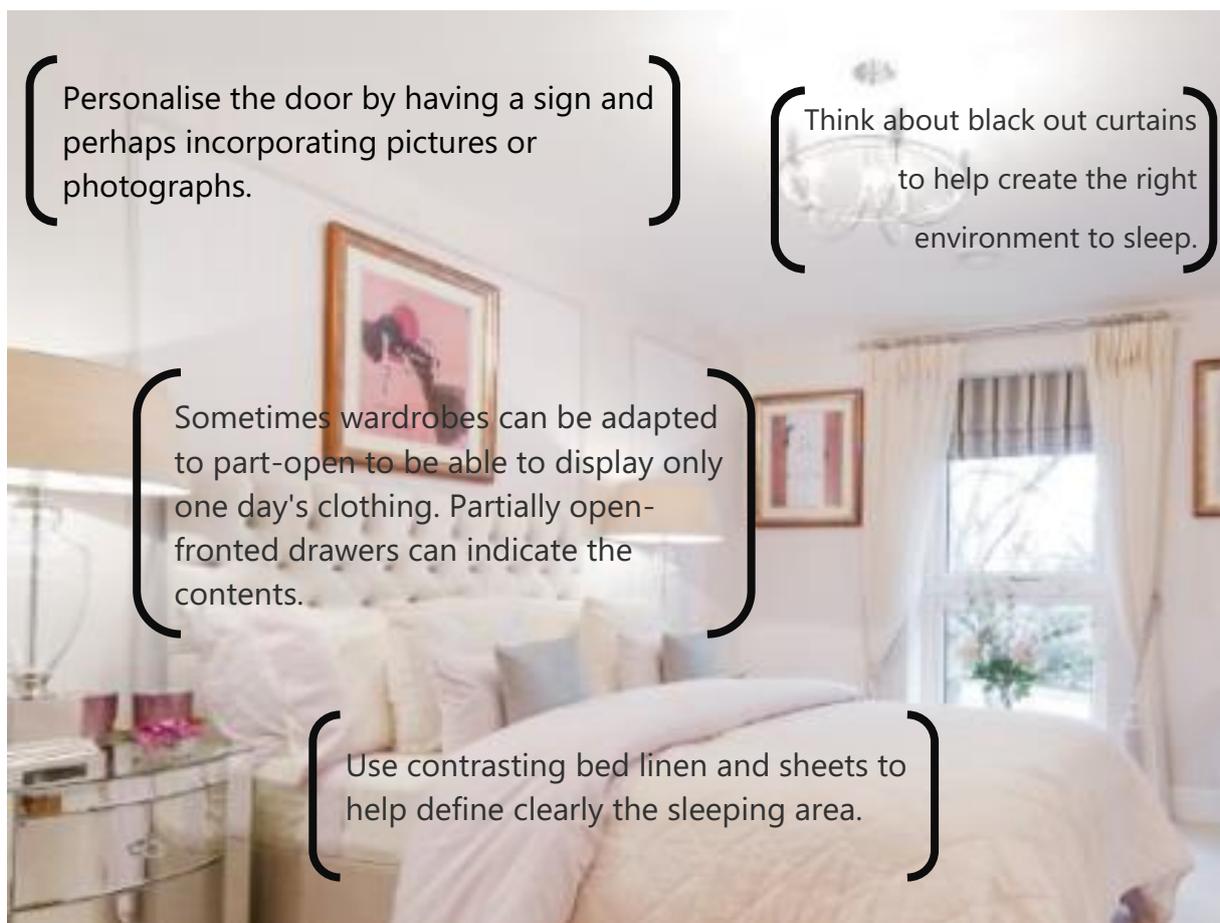
A large whiteboard with reminders on can help support someone through the day.

**Make sure you create an environment that is meaningful and engaging. Memory boxes things to touch.**

**The filling up is about creating a microcosm of interest, objects and triggers giving a message to people that they are still part of a full life which has been brought to them.**



## Bedroom



An analogue clock, in the person's field of view and set to the right time, can help someone make sense of the time of day.

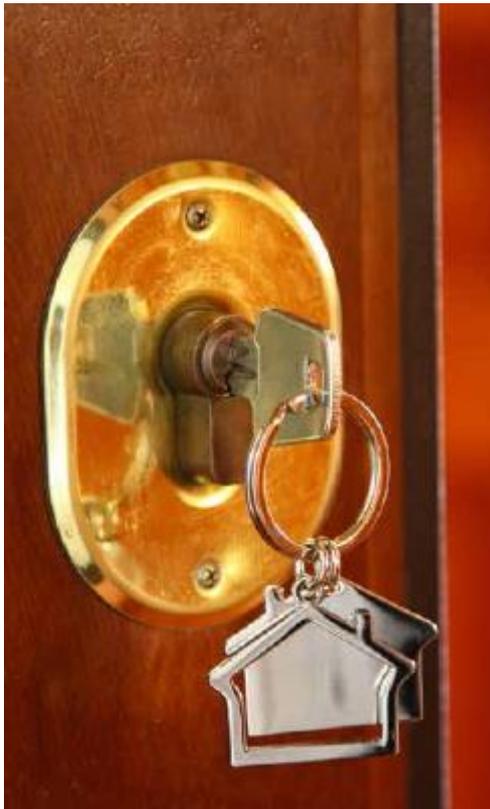
Helping a person with dementia to get a good night's sleep is vitally important.

**People with dementia can be anxious and frightened when they see their reflection in a mirror because they may not recognise the person who is looking back at them. If mirrors are the problem, cover or remove them.**

**Bed Occupancy Sensor**  
This sensor provides an early warning by alerting that the user has left their bed and not returned within a pre-set time, indicating a possible fall. The sensor can also be programmed to alert if a person has not got in or out of bed by a specified time. **Located in the Tunstall Technology Guide.**



## Entrances and Exits



### Property Exit Sensor

The property exit sensor is located above the door and comprises a PIR (Passive infra-red) movement detector, door contacts which together detect if someone has walked out of the door and not returned. The alarm can be set to activate for certain periods of the day, and will raise an alarm. The sensors can also be used to identify when a door has been left open.

**Located in the Tunstall Technology Guide.**

Think about signage on the door front, help a person recognise their doorway from another person's.

Add a landmark in front of the doorway, a large red vase could make their doorway stand out.



## Next Steps

There are many websites available that cater for people living with dementia and other disabilities. Below is a list of websites that will help you create a better environment for your loved one.

[www.unforgettable.org](http://www.unforgettable.org)

[www.alzproducts.co.uk](http://www.alzproducts.co.uk)

[www.nrshealthcare.co.uk](http://www.nrshealthcare.co.uk)

Other websites are available and can be found through a search engine and typing in 'dementia products for the home'.

