

How supporting aids can help

This help sheet explains what supportive aids are. It describes how supportive aids can help people living with dementia to live well at home, to feel safe and secure and support independence.

Supportive aids are devices or systems that help someone perform a task that they would otherwise be unable to do, or that make it easier to perform a task.

They range from simple equipment like calendar clocks and touch lamps to high-tech solutions such as location technology to help find someone who has become lost.

Supportive aids are sometimes called ‘assistive technology’.

Benefits of supportive aids

Supportive aids can help by:

- reducing the risk of accidents in and around the home
- supporting independence and choice for people living with dementia, and those around them
- delaying entry into residential accommodation or hospital admission
- reducing stress, so improving the quality of life for people living with dementia and their families and carers.

Consider which supportive aids are right for you

When you are living with dementia, familiarity is important, so only change things that need changing.

Ideally the person living with dementia will be involved in the decision-making process and agree to using the supportive aid.

Things to consider when deciding whether an aid or item is suitable for your situation:

- cost
- accessibility
- item selection based on technologies that are familiar to you
- ease of use.

Aids that provide prompts and reminders

Devices can provide visual, verbal and sound cues for people living with dementia. Situations where supportive aids may be helpful are described below.

Medication reminders and dispensers

These can help people living with dementia to take their medication correctly. They include:

- dosette boxes with separate flip-top pill box compartments labelled with the time and/or day of the week, for allocating medication doses
- automatic pill dispensers with visual and sound prompts
- Webster-paks® available from pharmacies
- medication management mobile phone apps

Knowing the date and time

People living with dementia who find it difficult to tell the time, or know what day of the week it is, may be helped by:

- clocks that display the time, day and date
- clocks that display day and night.

Reminder devices

Some devices, including mobile phones, tablets and smart speakers, enable audio messages to be played at set times during the day, for example: “It is three o’clock and time to take your pill”. Single or multiple messages can be recorded or set. Whiteboards and daily planners can also be useful.

Item finders

These are small bluetooth devices attached to items like keys, wallets, purses and glasses so a smartphone app can track where they are.

Signs and notices

A variety of visual aids, signs and pictures can help someone find items or rooms in the home, or prompt them about events or appointments.

Sensory and therapeutic supports

Sights, sounds, textures, smells and tastes allow someone living with dementia to experience the world at their own pace through their senses. Sensory simulation can also improve thinking skills, by helping them maintain an interest in their environment. This may be indoors at home, in a garden or in a residential care facility.

Supportive aids that provide sensory stimulation range from therapeutic dolls and mechanical pets to sensory cushions. As dementia progresses, these can be introduced into daily living.

Sometimes too much sensory stimulation can be overwhelming. Aids that may reduce unhelpful stimulation include noise cancelling headphones and weighted blankets.

Communication

Dementia can cause a gradual decrease in a person's ability to communicate and express themselves.

Supporting aids can help their communication, with some devices enabling them to let other people know the choices they would like to make.

Examples of communication aids are:

- Talking photo albums that allow audio recordings to be made and played when a photograph is viewed.
- Simple communication cards and posters.
- CommunicAid kit. It contains two flip book albums, sets of line illustrations, colour photographs and a CD. It can be used to indicate feelings and basic communication commands such as "I want a drink" and "I need the toilet".

Safety around the home

Supportive aids can improve safety around the home.

Supportive aids available for the home include:

- automatic night lights or sensor lights
- automatic devices to shut off power or gas to the stove
- automatic safety irons
- devices to release excess water in the bath
- bathing aids
- door and window sensors or monitors
- alerts to monitor outdoor gates
- fall detector personal alarms
- smart home automation systems.

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia-friendly home app:
Visit: dementia.org.au/resources/dementia-friendly-home-app
- Dementia Australia education: How dementia-friendly is your home?
Visit: dementia.org.au/education
- Living with dementia: home life
Visit: discrimination.dementia.org.au/home-life
- NED: National equipment database
Visit: asknet.com.au
- My Aged Care: request an occupational therapy assessment
Visit: myagedcare.gov.au
- Dementia Australia library:
Visit: dementia.org.au/library

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au