



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**  
Social Care **Wales**

# Dementia-friendly design

First published: 11 October 2018

Last updated: 13 September 2024

This document was downloaded from socialcare.wales and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/improving-care-and-support/people-with-dementia/dementia-friendly-design> for the latest version.

Learn about changes to the home environment which can help people living with a dementia to be more independent and safer at home.

## **Why colour contrast is important**

As people's eyes age, particularly if they have dementia, they lose their ability to notice changes in colours.

- Use strong, contrasting colours to draw attention to important items and give a sense of depth to a room
- Red is best, as older eyes see it most clearly. Another colour can also be effective as long as it stands out from the background.
- Fit contrasting toilet seats and grab rails in bathrooms. If the grab rail is white, add coloured duct tape or paint the wall behind a block colour
- A brightly coloured cushion on an armchair will increase the contrast between the chair, floor and wall
- Paint doors or the architrave of the main rooms in the house, or add a dementia friendly sign, or A3 coloured card
- Ensure stair handrail contrasts with the wall and highlight the edges of stairs with brightly coloured tape
- Walls should contrast with floors
- Use red masking tape on light switch or on the back plate.

## **Older eyes need more light to see clearly**

As people age they may need as much as 60 per cent more light to see things clearly.

- Maximise natural light by drawing curtains right back and opening blinds
- Turn on lights as the daylight fades
- Use bright bulbs and task lights
- Minimise changes in light levels between rooms. It will take a person's eyes a moment to adjust if going from a brightly lit room into a darker hallway, increasing the risk of a fall
- Ensure bedrooms can be made dark at night
- Leave the bathroom light on at night to help the person to find the toilet
- Simple changes to lighting may help people cope better with 'sundowning', where they become more restless and agitated when natural light drops in the evening.

## **Making the home less confusing**

Patterned furniture, changes in floor coverings and background noise can disorient and confuse someone with dementia. Learn how to minimise this:

- Consider replacing patterned materials such as flooring, curtains, bedding, wallpaper with block colours
- Have similar flooring throughout the house. People can see a change in flooring or door thresholds as a barrier
- Remove rugs; these can be a trip hazard and be misinterpreted as a hole
- Avoid reflections from windows or overhead lights. Areas of light and shadows in the room can increase confusion. Consider hanging a voile curtain or moving furniture/equipment to minimise the effect
- Remove, cover or move mirrors if people get distressed when looking in the mirror
- Reduce unnecessary noise by turning off the television or radio if no one's using it. As dementia progresses it becomes more difficult for a person to

filter sounds. The noise of the vacuum cleaner and washing machine may distract and make it more difficult to concentrate on tasks.

- Dementia-friendly clocks are available that clearly display day/night, the day of the week and the month. A large analogue clock with clear numbers can help. Apps are also available with time, day and date reminders.

## Useful resources

Find out more about dementia-friendly design.

[Advice from the Alzheimer's Society about making your home dementia-friendly](#)

[Llys Jasmine, the first extra care facility in Wales to feature dedicated apartments designed for people with dementia](#)

[The dementia-friendly home app](#)

## We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Dementia resource for care professionals by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).