

Creating a Dementia Friendly Home Environment



SCHIZOPHRENIA RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Dementia Care in SCARF (DEMCARES)



Who We Are

Dementia Care in Scarf (DEMCARES) is a project funded by the Infosys Foundation. DEMCARES is an integral part of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF), Chennai, which is a non-governmental, non-profit organization. One of the premier institutes in Asia for mental health research and training, SCARF is one of the very few NGOs in the world to be named as a Collaborating Centre of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Mental Health Research and Training.

At DEMCARES, we offer clinical services including outpatient consultation for geriatric mental health issues, home assessments, therapeutic interventions for people with dementia, support services for caregivers of people with dementia as well as providing research contributions within the field of dementia. We also offer training in dementia care for healthcare staff and caregivers.

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Creating a Dementia Friendly Home Environment

There are a number of simple adjustments you can make in your home to enable a person with dementia to be more independent. This tool will guide you through the basics of creating a dementia friendly home environment. Making minor changes can go a long way in improving mobility and ease at performing everyday activities such as bathing, getting dressed or eating etc.,. This will make the person more confident as well as ensure him/her better comfort at home.



Clear Signage

Mark the toilet, kitchen, and the bedroom to help identify where that space is and what it is used for. It is useful to have a picture on the signage. Signs could be used for individual drawers in a person's cupboard or desk. It is especially useful to list the contents of each drawer. This will reduce confusion and help the person locate the area they are trying to access easily.



Time

Keeping track of time is important for everyone, including those with dementia. Ensure that all the clocks in your house are easily visible, large and have bold numbering. This will help the person adapt and compensate for any visual deficits they may have. It will also help them keep track of the time even if they are not wearing their glasses. A day-night clock (shown below) may also help orient a person better. Another simple way to keep the person orientated to time is by making references through

conversations. For example you could say, “It’s 12.30 p.m, shall we have some lunch?”



Access

Clear pathways through the house for better access, especially in rooms frequently used by the person with dementia will help improve mobility. Removing unnecessary furniture or carpets could be beneficial. Avoid rearranging the furniture often, or changing the layout of the house, as this could lead to disorientation. These simple measures will encourage mobility in the PwD and decrease risks of falling.



Floors

Keep the floors a uniform matte colour without patterns and avoid shiny and reflective floors. This might make the person think that the floor is wet, causing them to alter the way they walk and lose balance. Using contrasting colours is generally a good technique to make things easily identifiable. You could start by replacing the existing towels with brightly coloured ones. Bed sheets, chairs, and hand-rails in bathrooms could also be made in contrasting colours to make them stand out. If there is a staircase in the house, the steps could be done in a colour contrasting the railing. The secret lies in simplicity. It is important to maintain a sense of familiarity. Large amounts of change will cause confusion.



Light

Letting more natural light into the home will create a more cheerful environment. Some simple strategies include drawing the curtains open and cleaning the windows to ensure that sunlight gets through. You could also switch to LED lights that are brighter and environment friendly. Making sure the house is properly lit during the day will help orient the person effectively to day and night. It will also compensate for decline in vision.



Sound

A calm and relaxing environment is essential in order to maintain a person's sense of well-being. Reducing the audio levels of TV and radio is one way of doing this. However, using a person's favourite music or radio program is a good way to engage and comfort them. Windows are another source of noise, but might also be a source of interest to the person. Give the person the option of being seated near the window and engage with the world outside. However, this might not be applicable for everyone. If you do notice the person becoming agitated, close the windows to reduce disturbance.



Bedroom

Here are some useful things to keep in mind to make bedrooms dementia friendly spaces:

- Place the bed in such a way that the person is able to see the entrance to the room. This will give them control and minimize their surprise when people enter it..
- Place a few personal items that belong to the person in their room, in a spot that can be seen easily. These items could include photographs, favourite books, or even music in the form of tapes and discs. This will help generate a sense of security and belonging.
- If the person is religious, it is useful to keep pictures or a small shrine/puja in the room especially if they are unable to access the puja room easily.
- It is best to have a bedroom with an attached bathroom for the person to use. Make sure that the person can see the bathroom from their bed easily. The light could be left on in the bathroom during the night. Appropriate signage on bathroom doors will help locate the bathroom.
- Keeping enough space on both sides of the bed will make it easier to change the sheets and clean the room. It will also reduce the risk of falls.
- Ensure adequate lighting at night to facilitate sleep and to help guide the

person in locating the bathroom, or water when necessary.



Bathrooms

Here are some useful things to keep in mind to make bathrooms dementia friendly spaces:

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- Appropriate signage on the toilet doors will help to locate the toilet easily.
- Installing handrails and non-skid mats to help keep the person independent when using the toilet & reduce the risk of falls.
- Changing the colour of the toilet seat to a colour different from the base, will make it easy to identify and use. Similarly, a bathroom door that is in a contrasting colour to the wall will make the bathroom easy to locate.
- Avoid using a bathmat that is contrastingly different from the floor. This might cause the person to think that it is a barrier that needs to be stepped over in order to access the bathroom.

- Traditional fittings and fixtures through the house are best if that is what the person is used to. Changing bathroom fixtures like taps and switches to ones that the person is unfamiliar with is not advisable.
- Keep a chair or stool in the bathroom in case the person needs support while bathing.



Kitchen

Reducing clutter in the kitchen can help in reducing confusion. Keeping safety valves for gas closed will reduce the risk of accidental fire. Having cupboards through which the contents are clearly visible from the outside will make it easier for the person to pick up items they need. Using transparent containers will also improve ease of access and reduce confusion.



Note: Ensure that the person has regular eye and ear check-ups. This will improve the person's level of functioning and make them more independent. It is also important to make sure that the person's footwear is comfortable and not worn out. This is a simple precaution to prevent falls in the house. Shoes that support the ankles will reduce the risk of falls.
