

# Early Stage Dementia: Creating an enabling home for someone living with dementia



# Who we are

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.**

**Our vision** is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

**Our mission** is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people enjoy better later lives.

**Our three strategic aims** are to:



**Help older people to be as well as they can be**



**Promote a positive view of ageing and later life**



**Tackle loneliness and isolation**

# How we can help

**We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.**

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

The Age Scotland helpline is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our friendship line is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.

## For information, advice and friendship



**Call us free on:**  
**0800 12 44 222**  
**(Mon – Fri, 9am - 5pm)**



**Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://agescotland.org.uk)**  
**to find out more.**



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## Introduction

Most people living with dementia want to remain in their own home for as long as possible. This guide looks at how adaptations can support someone living with dementia to be independent, safe and comfortable in their own home.

This information guide has been prepared by Age Scotland and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and cannot be used as a substitute for professional advice.

Neither Age Scotland nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use and it is the reader's sole responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate.

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.



## If you are a carer, friend, or family member

If you are wondering what you can do to help someone you know living with dementia remain safe and in their own home, there is a lot you can do to help. Before making any changes, there are a few things to consider:

- **Not all changes will work for everyone** - dementia can affect people in different ways. Any changes should take into account the way their dementia affects them, and any other health conditions or disabilities.
- **Involve the person living with dementia as much as possible** - try to work together to look at what would help. Respect their likes and dislikes, and find solutions that support them to do things, not restrict their day to day life.
- **Do not make unnecessary changes** - a person living with dementia may struggle to learn something new or to adapt to changes in their home, especially when things are moved or replaced with something unfamiliar. Try to keep things in the same place, and if you need to replace furniture choose something similar in shape and colour.
- **Plan for the future** - where you can, agree any changes sooner rather than later. This will give the person living with dementia time to adjust and to get used to them. It is possible that in the future they may forget that they have agreed to any changes.
- **Seek professional advice** - the person you care for is entitled to a care assessment from you council's social work department which can give you advice about changes to make and may help with the costs. If you receive support from a specialist dementia worker, ask them for advice.

See our guides **Caring for someone with Early Stage Dementia**, **Care and support at home: assessment and funding** and **Care and support at home: practical help** or call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** for advice about care assessments.

- **If you are a carer** - remember you are also entitled to support. You can ask your council for a Carer's Assessment, or speak to your local Carer Centre. Services vary but may include practical help and equipment, emotional support and respite care. See our Adult Carer guide for more information about your rights as a carer.
- **Fire Safety** - living with dementia increases the risk of fire. Someone may forget to switch off electric fires or cookers, blow out candles, or put out cigarettes. Placing metal in microwaves and putting electric kettles on hobs are also common problems.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service can arrange a free home fire safety visit and can make sure that the home is as safe as it can be.

### **The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

**0800 0731 999**

**[www.firescotland.gov.uk](http://www.firescotland.gov.uk)**



## Keeping warm in winter

People living with dementia may forget to keep warm during the winter, sitting in cold rooms or not wearing enough layers of clothing. Being cold for any length of time can increase the risk of colds, flu and hypothermia, heart attacks and stroke. The rooms used during the day should be at around 23°C throughout the year. Bedroom windows should be closed at night when it is cold as cold air can increase the risk of chest infections. Layered clothing helps to maintain body heat and moving about, rather than sitting still, helps you to feel warmer.

There are benefits, grants and schemes to make your home more energy efficient and improve your heating. Contact Home Energy Scotland for information and advice.

### **Home Energy Scotland**

**0808 808 2282**

**[www.homeenergyscotland.org](http://www.homeenergyscotland.org)**



## What financial support may be available to adapt your home?

Councils have a duty to provide assistance to make a house suitable for a disabled person. The council must give a “mandatory grant” for any changes that they consider to be essential. Grants can be given to adapt a house to enable access to the toilet, bath or shower, wash hand basin and sink. This could include installing handrails, a level access shower or lowering worktops. The minimum level of grant is 80% of the cost. If the person with dementia receives any of the following benefits, they will get a 100% grant, meeting all the costs of the work.

- Income Support
- Income-Based Jobseeker’s Allowance
- Pension Credit (guarantee credit)
- Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Universal Credit

If they rent their home, they must seek their landlord’s consent before beginning any work. A landlord can withhold consent, but must have a good reason to do so. When giving consent a landlord can set conditions, such as asking to comment on plans or requiring that adaptations are removed when the tenancy ends. If common areas of a building need to be adapted, such as shared stairs in a tenement, or adding a ramp outside a shared doorway, a majority of the property owners need to consent. There only needs to be a majority of one owner, so you won’t be prevented from making the adaptation if a minority object.

If you have the consent you need to make the adaptation, you can apply to the council for grant help in the same way that a homeowner would.

If living at home puts you at risk, even with support from carers, you may need to consider the longer-term option of a care home.

For more information see Age Scotland’s publications:

- **Housing options**
- **Older homeowners’ guide**
- **Care homes**

Call the **Age Scotland Helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.

### Care and Repair Scotland

Care and Repair services operate in most areas of Scotland to offer independent advice and assistance to homeowners. They repair, improve or adapt homes so that people can live in comfort and safety, and many provide handyperson services to help with things like changing lightbulbs. The service is generally available to people who own their own homes, private tenants and crofters who are aged 60 or over or who have a disability.

#### Care and Repair Scotland

**0141 221 9879**

**[www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk)**



# Creating a dementia enabling home

There are some general changes around the house that can help someone living with dementia to continue their day to day life as independently as possible:

## Lighting

As people age, they need more light for their eyes to see well. Good lighting is even more important for people living with dementia, because their ability to understand what they see can be affected. Good lighting and access to natural light can help people with dementia stay more alert during the day and sleep better at night. For a home to be more dementia enabling:

- Let in as much natural light as possible. Pull back curtains and make sure windows are clean and not blocked by outside trees or bushes.
- Minimise shadows, as some people living with dementia resist going near dark areas.
- Avoid spotlights and reduce glare. Light on shiny floors can be mistaken for a puddle.
- Coloured or reflective tape can highlight light switches so they are easy to find.
- Install nightlights or motion-activated lights which come on if anyone gets up during the night to minimise the risk of falls.
- Download a lux meter app for your phone or tablet. This will measure the lighting level of any room.

## Signposting around the house

- Signs and notices around the house can help to identify where things are, or which door leads to which room. They work best if they include pictures as well as words.

## Use similar floor tones between rooms

- A threshold between rooms could be seen as a barrier to entering a room. Keep similar floor tones between rooms to encourage someone to move freely about the house.

## Contrasting furniture

- Furniture that contrasts in tone with the decor makes it easier to identify the furniture against the background of the wall and floor. Choose contrasting tones with a mix of dark and light colours.

## Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors

- A carbon monoxide detector and linked smoke and heat alarms should be installed.
- Check at least once a month that alarms are working.
- If the person living with dementia would not know what to do when the alarm sounds, find out if it is possible to install alarms that trigger an alert to a call centre or a trusted local person such as a carer.



## Clutter

- Clutter can confuse the eye and increase the risk of tripping and falling. Try to keep things cleared away and tidy. If you need to buy extra storage, label it with its contents.
- If you are considering making changes in the home you must respect how the person living with dementia lives. It may matter to them to have things that are important to them on display or close to hand.

## Noise

- For some people living with dementia, noise can be distracting or distressing, especially if they cannot ignore it, and do not know what it is, or where it is coming from. Background noise can be reduced by keeping internal doors closed. Soft furnishings, like carpets, cushions and curtains can also help absorb noise.

## Patterned curtains and carpets

- Dementia can affect how some people see things; patterns on curtains, cushions or wallpaper may be confusing.
- A patterned carpet or rug might look like uneven ground, a dark rug on a light carpet may look like a hole and rugs with speckled designs or dots may look as if they have things scattered on them.
- If you are changing the carpets or wallpaper, consider replacing them with a plain or less-patterned design.
- If you are considering making changes, respect the views of the person living with dementia and consult them first.

## Colour coded keys and locks

- You can buy different coloured tabs to put on keys and paint the lock with the colour to match the key.

## Clocks

- You can buy dementia enabling clocks that display the day of the week, date and time, and show if it is day or night.

## Telephones

- Telephones are an easy and familiar way to stay in touch. Dementia enabling telephones have larger buttons for those with visual impairment and can include pictures of friends and family next to automatic dial buttons.





## Technology

Some people with dementia find technology useful in their home. If you have internet access, visit the **Alzheimer Scotland** website <https://meetadam.co.uk> for information on the technology available.

An occupational therapist can assess your needs and give you advice about, or even provide, equipment for daily living. Contact your council to request an assessment if you think this could help you.

**Assistive technology** can help people with daily tasks that they are starting to find more difficult:

- **Item locators** can help to find easily lost items, such as keys. You can attach an electronic keyring to your set of keys and keep the locator button close by to you, so you easily find your keys.
- **Reminder aids** can play messages at a certain time, such as a reminder to lock the door at night.
- **Talking watches** speak the time and date in a clear voice at the press of a button.
- **Telecare** supports people to remain safe in their home.
  - A personal alarm allows someone to call for help if they have fallen or are unwell.
  - Gas, smoke and flood detectors automatically alert staff at a response centre or a family member if there is a problem. Some gas detectors can switch off the gas supply when they detect a problem.
- **Digital technology** can be a useful tool to add to your home.
  - A range of computer programmes are available to download for your smartphone or tablet which can support your daily life.

For information on the range of dementia enabling devices available visit the **Disability Information Scotland** website [www.disabilityscot.org.uk/directory](http://www.disabilityscot.org.uk/directory) or call them on **0300 323 9961**.

**Care Information Scotland** also provides information on available equipment: [www.careinfoscotland.scot](http://www.careinfoscotland.scot) or call **0800 011 3200**.

## Positive changes can be made in the living room:

### Clocks:

Replace with a clock which shows if it is day or night and the day of the week



### Lighting:

Open the blind and curtains  
Have a daylight bulb in the lamp



### Contrasts and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floors and furniture  
Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

### Furniture:

If you are replacing any furniture, make sure that it is at a suitable height that takes into account any mobility issues.

### Smoke alarm:

There should be a smoke alarm in the room where you spend most of your time, linked to other alarms in your home.

### Clutter:

Remove clutter and cables where you can  
Do not move things which are precious to the person living with dementia  
Label where you have put things away

### Universal remotes:

Someone with dementia may find it easier to use a universal remote with its bigger buttons and simpler design. A universal remote allows control of several electronic devices in the room.

### Temperature:

Make sure that the room is at a comfortable temperature ideally around 23C° in winter.





Any decisions about changes should involve the person living with dementia and respect their views where possible.

## Positive changes can be made in the kitchen:



### Install:

Heat detector linked to other alarms in your home

Gas switch off valve if appropriate

### Storage:

Clearly label cupboards with their contents; use words and images, remove cupboard doors or replace them with clear doors

### Contrasts and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between wall, floors, work surfaces, crockery and equipment

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

Minimise shiny surfaces

Change glass-topped furniture

### Kitchen equipment:

Choose a kettle that switches off automatically

If you are replacing equipment, try to choose a familiar design and colour

Look for equipment with large buttons and not too many choices



**Lighting:**

Minimise glare and shiny surfaces  
Light areas evenly  
Have strip lights if this helps to identify fridges, washing machines and cupboards

**Risks:**

Minimise clutter on the floor and on work surfaces

You can add reminder notes on fridge and cupboard doors.

## Positive changes can be made in the bedroom:

### Mirrors:

Remove or cover mirrors which cause glare or confusing reflections

### Wardrobes and storage:

Are the wardrobe handles easy to see and use?

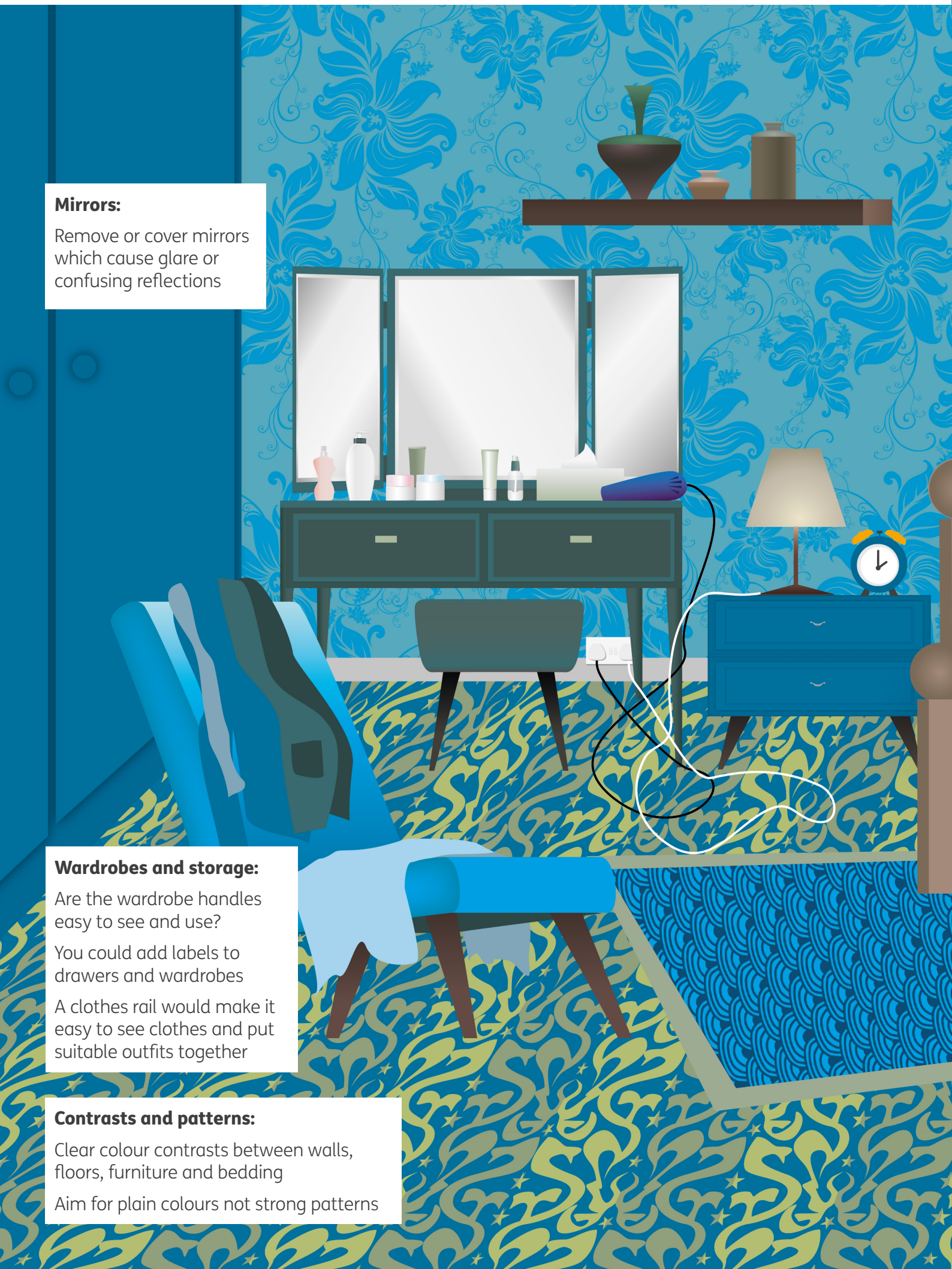
You could add labels to drawers and wardrobes

A clothes rail would make it easy to see clothes and put suitable outfits together

### Contrasts and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floors, furniture and bedding

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns





### Bedroom Light:

Replace curtains with a heavy weight pair, or a blackout blind, which will make the bedroom darker at night if this helps the person living with dementia to sleep

### Alarm Clock:

Replace with a clock which shows if it is day or night and the day of the week

A talking clock may help someone who is visually impaired. For information visit [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## Positive changes can be made in the bathroom:

### Glass and mirrors:

Remove or cover mirrors which cause glare or confusing reflections

### The bath and shower:

- Grab rails may help to get in and out of the bath
- Flood detectors could stop the bath getting too full
- Anti-slip mats can reduce the risks of falls
- Set water temperature to avoid the risk of scalding
- A shower curtain would reduce glare
- Have separate hot and cold taps, rather than mixer taps
- A shower stool can also be useful if you have problems standing in the shower





### **Contrasts and patterns:**

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floors, bath, shower, toilet and toilet seat, towels and mats

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

Consider a coloured toilet seat to provide contrast and make it easier for people to access the toilet.

### **Bathroom door:**

Consider labelling or painting the door and leaving it open when the bathroom is not in use, so it is easy to see the toilet

Consider removing the bathroom door lock

### **Storage:**

Clearly label cupboards with their contents; use words and images or remove cupboard doors

Speak to a pharmacist about options for storing medications safely

## Positive changes can be made in the hallway:

### Colours and patterns:

Clear colour contrasts between walls, floor, stairs and banister

Aim for plain colours not strong patterns

Mark the edges of steps with colour

### Smoke alarm:

You should have a smoke alarm in the hallway, linked to other alarms in your home



An illustration of a cluttered front door area. The background is a wall with a repeating pattern of stars and floral motifs. A wooden door is in the center. To the left, a wooden staircase railing is visible. In the foreground, there is a pile of white envelopes and papers on a patterned rug. A tiger is lying on the rug. A pair of yellow boots is on the left. A shopping bag and a newspaper are on the right. A keychain with a purple tag is hanging from the door handle. A white box with text is on the right, and another white box with text is on the left.

### The front door:

Have colour contrast between the door, walls and floor

Have a handle and lock which are easy to see and use

Consider an intercom

Have a checklist on the door about locking up at night or when going out

Keep keys somewhere safe

### Hazards:

Remove clutter

Open mail and deal with important matters

A higher letterbox, with a basket to catch the mail, would help to stop post from becoming a trip hazard.

## Positive changes can be made in the outside space:



Easy access to the garden makes it more tempting to go outside. There are many adaptations that can be made:

**Handrails:** Handrails with colour contrast outside the front and back door can help with climbing steps or getting through the door.

**Paths:** Paths should be level, clear and well defined; paths which run in a loop are easy for people living with dementia to follow.

**Lighting:** Especially in the evening, open spaces should be brightly lit to help with moving around the garden or driveway. This could include outside lights near benches or other features.

**Seating:** Benches should be in good condition, and in an accessible location.



**Planting:** Non-toxic plants can be good for sensory stimulation with their different textures and smells.

Gardening also offers opportunities for reminiscence and gentle exercise.

Garden beds can be raised to allow easier access when gardening.

Getting outside has many benefits for people living with dementia – providing physical exercise, stress relief and even improving sleep patterns. These are ideas for ensuring any outside spaces are dementia enabling.



## Useful contacts

### Age Scotland helpline 0800 12 44 222

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us on **0800 12 44 222** for a copy of our publications list or download / order copies from our website at **[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

### Alzheimer Scotland

Alzheimer Scotland campaigns for the rights of people with dementia and their families and provides advice and support services.

**0808 808 3000 / [www.alzscot.org.uk](http://www.alzscot.org.uk)**

### Care Information Scotland

Care Information Scotland provides information about care services.

**0800 011 3200 / [www.careinfoscotland.scot](http://www.careinfoscotland.scot)**

### Care and Repair Scotland

Local Care and Repair services offer advice and assistance to older people and disabled homeowners in most areas of Scotland to repair, improve or adapt their homes so they can live safely and comfortably.

**0141 221 9879 / [www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk)**

### Disability Information Scotland

Disability Information Scotland provides information about the maze of disability support in Scotland.

**0300 323 9961 / [www.disabilityscot.org.uk](http://www.disabilityscot.org.uk)**

### Disabled Living Foundation

The Disabled Living Foundation provides information and advice on equipment and technology for daily living.

**0300 999 0004 / [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)**

### Home Energy Scotland

Home Energy Scotland gives information and advice on how you can save money and energy and make your home warmer.

**0808 808 2282 / [www.homeenergyscotland.org](http://www.homeenergyscotland.org)**

### Scottish Fire and Rescue

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service can make sure your home is as safe as it can be. You can contact them for a free home safety visit.

**0800 0731 999 / [www.firescotland.gov.uk](http://www.firescotland.gov.uk)**

# How you can help

## Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



### Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- ▶ Call **03330 15 14 60**
- ▶ Visit **age.scot/donate**
- ▶ Text **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.\*



### Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



### Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

\* Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

## Let's keep in touch



### Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today by visiting **age.scot/roundup**



### Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



**/agescotland**



**@AgeScotland**



**@age\_scotland**



**/AgeScotland**

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**Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.**



**Contact us:**

**Head office**

0333 323 2400

**Age Scotland helpline**

0800 12 44 222

**Email**

info@agescotland.org.uk

**Visit our website**

www.agescotland.org.uk

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We are grateful to the Scottish Government for part-funding this publication

