

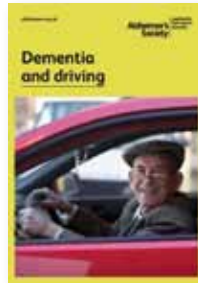
**Booklets in the Living with dementia series**



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Alzheimer's Society Dementia Helpline  
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# Keeping safe in your home



Living alone might seem frightening if you know you have dementia. There are several things you can do to make yourself feel more secure and safe. This booklet outlines some of them. You can get help from your local Alzheimer's Society branch, your local authority and social services. You can also ask your GP to refer you to an occupational therapist, who will visit you and suggest ways of making your home safer.

## General tips

- Keep a list of emergency numbers where you can find it: perhaps near the telephone.
- Keep other useful information accessible too: where the stopcock is; where the gas and electricity meters are; where fuses are kept; where to find the first aid box.
- Keep a large week-to-view diary in a prominent place, and write everything down.
- Have appliances checked regularly. Keep records, and store them in a safe place.
- For electrical appliances, always use a qualified electrician.
- For gas appliances, always use a Corgi-registered installer.
- For open fireplaces, have chimneys swept once a year, or more often if you burn wood.

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## Alterations to your home

You may not need to make any structural changes to your home. However, think about what you might need in the future. An occupational therapist can advise you on alterations such as:

- handrails
- making doorways wider
- ramps
- extra heating.

Sometimes you may need to make major alterations to your home. You may be able to get grants from your local authority for this. The occupational therapist can tell you what steps to take.

**You may be able to get a grant  
for alterations to your home**

## Security

Be careful when answering the door to strangers. If you are expecting a visit from a tradesman, keep a note of who is coming and when. It may be useful to put a note on the inside of the front door.

Have a chain fitted on the inside of the front door. If you have unexpected calls, always ask to see identity cards before letting people in. Call the phone number on the card to check if you are not sure. Don't be afraid to shut the front door while you do this. If callers are genuine, they will understand.

Think about fitting locks to your windows and security locks on your doors. Make sure you know how to open and lock them quickly and easily. Neighbourhood Watch or your local community police officer can advise you.



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## Electricity

Don't use appliances that have worn or damaged flexes. Never put more than one appliance on one plug. If you have lots of appliances and only one socket, use a strip extension lead instead of lots of adaptors. It's safer to turn appliances off at the plug before you go to bed. You can get timers for plugs so that you don't have to remember to do this. You can also use timers on lights in hallways, for example, so that you can get to bed safely.

**For electrical appliances, always use a qualified electrician**



## Heating

Central heating is the safest and easiest way to keep warm, but it can be expensive. Consider fitting room thermostats. Rooms that you use a lot can be kept warm, and rooms that you don't use as much can be cooler.

Central heating often works on a timer system. This means you won't have to remember to turn the heating on. If you have a gas or an electric fire, make sure it is serviced regularly. For portable gas or electric heaters, think about fitting an extra guard, and keep them well away from furniture and curtains.

Open fires can be very dangerous: never use one without a fire-guard, and make sure your chimney is swept at least once a year. If you have other ways of keeping warm, try to use your open fire as little as possible.

Never air or dry clothes near a fire, even if it is well guarded. Use electric blankets correctly, and have them checked regularly.

**Consider fitting carbon monoxide detectors in rooms with gas fires to give early warnings of problems**

## Water

You may find that you forget to turn taps off. It is possible to install taps that reduce the risk of flooding. For example, some will only work if your hands are under them. Others turn off automatically after a set amount of water has flowed, or after a set time. Your local water company should be able to provide a catalogue of suitable taps.



## Fire protection

- If you smoke, make sure you have enough ashtrays around the house.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Try to ensure that your furniture is fire resistant.
- Be extra careful when you're in the kitchen, especially when cooking with oil or fat.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.
- Fit smoke alarms (see page 8).
- If there is a fire:
  - Don't try to put the fire out
  - Get out of the house without delay
  - Call 999 on a neighbour's phone or from a call box
  - Don't go back in, not even for pets.

**Never air or dry clothes near a fire, even if it is well guarded**

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## Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are run by batteries or by mains electricity:

- Battery-run alarms are cheap and easy to fit. Most batteries last a year but you can buy long-life batteries that last ten or 15 years.
- Mains-run alarms mean that you don't have to change the battery. But you should also have a back-up power supply, such as a battery, in mains-powered alarms.

Smoke alarms should be screwed into the ceiling, at least 30cm away from walls and electric fittings. Test alarm batteries once a week by pressing the button until the alarm sounds.

Replace smoke alarms every ten years. Smoke alarms give early warning of a fire, by detecting smoke and sounding an alarm. Smoke alarms are not needed in every room and are best fitted in hallways and at the top of stairs. They should not be in the kitchen and bathroom as heat and vapour from cooking and bathing can set smoke alarms off unnecessarily. Be aware that too many smoke alarms would be confusing as a lot of noise is disorientating and could hinder escape.

## Cooking

People with dementia often worry that they will forget to turn the gas cooker off. It is possible to have a special gas tap fitted that friends and family can turn off when they leave your home. This means that you will only be able to cook when someone is with you. Having the gas tap fitted is often a hard decision to make. You could lose some of your independence. You may want to discuss this with family and friends. Check your cooker is safe. If it is an electric cooker, it's a good idea to ask a qualified electrician to check it. If you have a gas cooker, have it checked regularly by a Corgi-registered installer.

Use a smoke alarm, but not in the kitchen itself or directly outside it. The heat from cooking can set it off unnecessarily. The smoke alarm should be in the hall. A microwave oven can make cooking easier. It can also be used to reheat food. However, be aware that food and liquids can become very hot. You must not put metal containers or cutlery in a microwave oven.

**Test your smoke alarms every week  
and replace them every ten years**

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## Kitchen

Plan your storage areas so that things you use often are within easy reach. You shouldn't have to climb on chairs to get to cupboards. If you do need to reach high cupboards, use a small stepladder. Don't keep heavy items in high cupboards. Make sure you throw away food that is stale or out of date. You could put a note on the fridge door to remind yourself.

If you have problems cutting food, you can get a non-slip mat to put under dishes or boards. This stops the dishes and boards from moving. You can also buy knives with specially shaped handles. These are easier to control. You should keep knives sharp and in good condition. Make sure can openers are easy to use.



You can get an electric kettle that switches itself off once it has boiled. Take extra care with boiling water, and use mugs and cups that have a wide base. Don't overfill the kettle; only boil as much water as you need.

### If you smell gas

- Do turn the gas off at the meter
- Do open doors and windows
- Do call the gas emergency service on 0800 111 999
- Don't turn electric switches on or off
- Don't use naked flames
- Don't smoke

**For gas appliances, always use  
a Corgi-registered installer**

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## Stairs

Stairs can be very dangerous: 60 per cent of deaths from accidents in the home are a result of falls on the stairs. Consider fitting handrails on the walls on both sides. Never leave objects on the stairs, and try not to carry too much when going up or down them. Think about using a large shoulder bag that will keep both hands free if you do have to carry things on the stairs.



## Tips on how to avoid falls

- Make sure your house is well lit, especially in the hall and on the stairs.
- Keep a torch by the bed.
- Avoid trailing wires and flexes.
- Nail or tape down the edges of rugs.
- Replace worn rugs and carpets.
- Have a letter tray fitted on your front door.
- Try not to bend or climb. If you must climb, use proper steps.
- Get up from chairs or the bed slowly.
- Have regular eye tests.
- Avoid trailing clothes which may trip you up.
- If your prescribed drugs are making you feel dizzy, keep taking them, but talk to your GP.
- Consider fitting handrails, especially on the stairs and in the bathroom.

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## Bathrooms

- Never take portable heaters into the bathroom.
- Non-slip mats fitted in the bath can help to prevent accidents.
- If the water gets very hot, it may be possible to adjust the temperature on the boiler.
- When running a bath, put the cold water in first and then the hot water.
- If you live alone, never lock the bathroom door.
- Consider using a plastic garden chair in a walk-in shower with a non-slip mat underneath.

**Taps are available that turn themselves off after a set time**

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## Gardening

If your garden is overgrown and untidy, you may be more likely to fall in it. Help the Aged can help with looking after your garden. Telephone 01255 477921.



## Getting help

Talk to your family and friends about ways you would like to be supported. You could, for example, leave a spare set of keys with a good friend in case you forget your own keys. Think about buying a personal alarm system. For example, Age Concern can provide an Aid-Call system. If you fall or need help, you press the button and they will arrange for someone to come to your home and help you. This could be a neighbour, a friend or a relative. They can also call out the emergency services.

Telephone Age Concern on 0800 77 22 66 for more information. Help the Aged runs a similar service called SeniorLink: telephone 01255 473999.

**Don't forget to talk to your friends and family. They are always there to support you**

## Useful contacts

### Age UK

York House  
207-221 Pentonville Road  
London N1 9UZ  
T 0800 169 8787 (general enquiries)  
0800 169 6565 (advice line)  
E [contact@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:contact@ageuk.org.uk)  
[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Provides information and advice for older people in the UK.

Age UK has been created by the merger of Age Concern and Help the Aged.

### Alzheimer's Society

Devon House  
58 St Katharine's Way  
London E1W 1LB  
T 020 7423 3500  
E [info@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:info@alzheimers.org.uk)  
[alzheimers.org.uk](http://alzheimers.org.uk)

### Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors (APHC)

T 0121 711 5030 (main switchboard)  
0121 711 5033 (technical and safety helpline)  
[www.competentpersonsscheme.co.uk](http://www.competentpersonsscheme.co.uk)

### Corgi

First Floor Unit 7  
Prisma Park  
Berrington Way  
Basingstoke RG24 8GT  
T 0870 401 2200  
E [answers@trustcorgi.com](mailto:answers@trustcorgi.com)  
[www.trustcorgi.com](http://www.trustcorgi.com)

### National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC)

T 0870 013 0382  
[www.niceic.org.uk](http://www.niceic.org.uk)

### Neighbourhood Watch

T 0116 271 0052  
[www.neighbourhoodwatch.net](http://www.neighbourhoodwatch.net)

### Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

RoSPA House  
28 Calthorpe Road  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 1RP  
T 0121 248 2000  
[www.rospace.org.uk](http://www.rospace.org.uk)

### UK Fire Service Resources

[www.fireservice.co.uk/safety](http://www.fireservice.co.uk/safety)

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