

The kitchen

THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEMENTIA

This Help Sheet suggests some ways to make the kitchen as useful and safe as possible for a person with dementia, their family and carers. Not all suggestions will suit all people or situations, but some people may find a solution to a particular problem they are experiencing in the kitchen.

The aim of any changes to the kitchen is to promote safety and maintain skills and participation for as long as possible.

Try to simplify the kitchen at the same time as keeping it as familiar as possible. Don't unnecessarily rearrange cupboards, bench tops or change the décor.

If the person can no longer participate in kitchen activities and if space allows, consider adding a comfortable chair so that they can sit near the carer while they work in the kitchen. This enables them to continue to experience the familiar kitchen activities, noises and smells.

What to try

Kettle and appliances

If the person with dementia can no longer remember to turn off the kettle or electric jug, try a whistle on the kettle or buy an electric jug with an automatic cut off switch. Pop-up toasters, and 'auto cut off' cordless kettles and irons are safer. However, the person may not be able to learn to use new appliances. When an appliance needs to be replaced, buy the same brand and model if at all possible to help the person retain their skill.

Tea and coffee making

If a regular drinking cup is replaced with a mug or a different coloured cup, it may no longer be recognisable as a cup. If tea bags are no longer recognised, try loose tea and a teapot.

Try putting all the tea things together somewhere visible - perhaps near the electric jug on the bench top.

If possible, put an electric jug well away from the stove to discourage the person from putting an electric jug onto the stove. If it is no longer possible to use a kettle or jug, the person may recognise and use a thermos.

Stove

Painted lines on stove knobs with green and red fluorescent paint or red nail polish can help to locate 'off' and 'on', and make it more obvious if the knob is not turned off. Put a note on the wall "turn stove off" or write step-by-step instructions.

If there is a possibility of leaving cooking oil on an unattended cook top and causing a fire, consider taking away or locking up the cooking oil.

A timer can be installed for the whole stove and set for an average cooking time, after which time the hotpoint or oven will automatically switch off. It is also possible to set an upper time limit or maximum time for the stove to be on.

Ways to stop a person with dementia from using the stove include:

- Knob covers
- A master cut off switch for the stove in a discreet place, such as a high cupboard
- Removing the stove knobs
- As a last resort, disconnecting the stove completely

