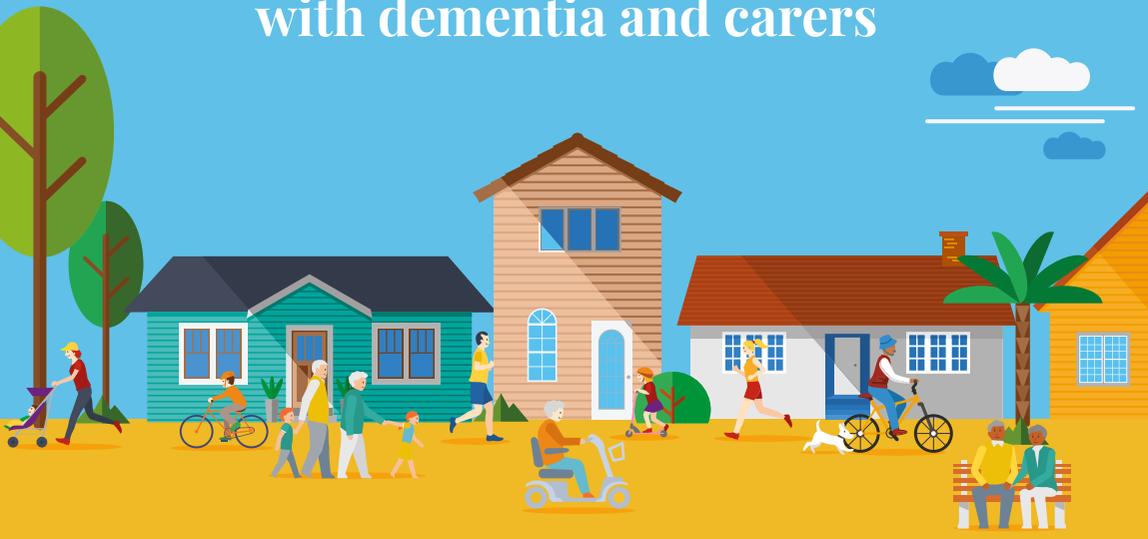


Sample chapter

Community Support Essentials

My home, my life

Practical ideas for people
with dementia and carers



Colm Cunningham and Natalie Duggan
with Agnes Houston

Sample chapter

09 Better bathrooms and bedrooms

What we will learn

- How to enhance independence in personal care
- Care and design that supports
- Filling in the gaps of processes

Bathrooms and dignity in personal care

There are certain moments in the day when the bathroom is the most important room in the house! Going to the bathroom and attending to personal care can become difficult depending on the progression of dementia. So it is important to consider bathroom design to promote dignity and independence.⁴¹

As a general principle it is good to support independent showering, dressing and going to the toilet for as long as possible. This will be easier with safe bathrooms that are easy to find and designed to reduce the risk of falls.

Of course we all would prefer bathing and showering to be a relaxing—and not stressful—experience and this is more likely if the person feels that their privacy and dignity is protected and they are safe.

Some common bathroom and personal care challenges are:

- finding the toilet (in time)
- recognising the toilet or seeing it clearly
- reluctance to undress and wash
- knowing if the water is too hot or too cold
- mobility issues such as getting on and off the toilet or in and out of the bath or shower
- loss of awareness (in more advanced dementia) of the need to go to the bathroom, or what to do if the need becomes apparent.



An easily visible toilet with contrasting seat, rail and wall colour.

Design that enhances

A range of design changes and adjustments may help provide support for these challenges and they include:

- signs, light and cues for navigating to the bathroom
- removing items such as waste bins which could be mistaken as a toilet seat
- anti-slip finish for flooring and robust rails (in contrasting colours) to support use of the toilet and bath/shower
- appropriate bath and toilet aids or frames providing they don't increase confusion or distress
- contrasting colour for the toilet seat (avoid white on white) and easy to see and reach toilet paper and holder
- traditional cross-head tap fittings preferably colour coded for hot and cold, with water temperature adjusted so as not to scald
- avoiding any inconsistencies (loose or cracked tiles) in the floor to help prevent falls.

Care that complements design

These design features are complemented by a variety of dementia care approaches which can be tailored to suit care needs:

- If the person with dementia is finding dressing difficult, make it easier by providing pants with an elastic or Velcro waist.
- Use anti-slip mats in low contrast colour around the bath or the shower. A person might not step in to the bath if there is a mat in front of it that looks like a hole.
- Ensure bathroom products that may present a risk are put away including razors, medicines, shampoo and conditioners.
- If the person has difficulty with the lock from inside the bathroom door, consider changing to an easier, safer lock.
- No one enjoys being cold when undressing so provide an appropriate heater in the bathroom (heating lamps in a light fitting are safest).
- Try playing relaxing personally-tailored music before and during shower time (or sing together). This can promote calmness at a time when a person with dementia might otherwise feel anxiety.
- If the person finds that certain smells also help relax them, try using this in the shower or bath—e.g. coconut shampoo and conditioner or lavender soap—depending on what the person likes.
- Exhaust fans help reduce steam which otherwise may add to feelings of confusion or anxiety.
- Try putting a commode chair near the bed if the person struggles to get up at night to find the bathroom. This can be more dignifying than putting on a night-time pad.

Filling in the gaps

Sometimes dementia may affect the person's ability to start or continue a process or activity and so rather than taking over, a carer can support by filling in the gaps. Providing assistance for going to the toilet may be as simple as a carer saying, 'I am going to the toilet before we head out,' which triggers that thought for the person with dementia.

At other times, it might be that the person needs help with another part of the process which is easy for others to take for granted such as standing up and getting moving, or locating the toilet. Either way, remember that filling in the gaps might be the care needed to support independence.

It's timely to mention that appropriate seating can make a difference—make sure it enables the person to stand up and get going.⁴²

Caring tip: Contrasting colours for toilet seats, bath edges and also for taps will make it easier for people who are experiencing sensory challenges or weakening eyesight. Another colour tip may be to paint all the bathroom doors in the home the same colour so they are more easily recognised. Of course not every person with dementia needs any or all of the supports listed—look for what helps in your home.

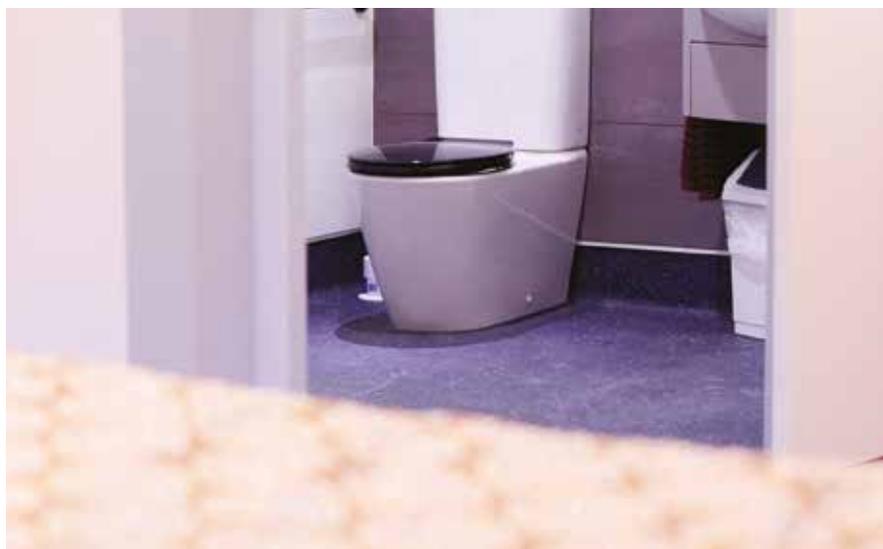
A word on ensuites

Ensuites warrant some additional advice as they can play a big role in promoting independence. Some incontinence can be a result of a person with dementia not being able to find or get to the toilet in time, or simply forgetting that it might be time to do so. As ensuites are positioned adjacent to bedrooms, they can be an important cue that reduces incontinence.

Many homes have ensuites nowadays, others may have bedrooms adjacent to bathrooms which could be turned into an ensuite. But where it is not possible or too expensive,

having clear visual cues (signs, lighting) to the nearest toilet or bathroom.

Where you have an ensuite, it can further assist to position the bed in the adjacent room so the toilet can be seen from the head of the bed.



Being able to see the toilet from bed can aid getting there in time!

Help with incontinence

Where incontinence is a serious and repetitive issue, regardless of the measures above, some common supports include:

- using waterproof mattress (and chair) protectors
- continence pads
- a linen service to clean sheets—this will reduce workload considerably
- contacting continence support organisations such as the Continence Foundation of Australia, Continence NZ, UK Continence Society or National Association for Continence in the US.

Comfortable bedrooms

Bedrooms are one of our most private places where we sleep, dress and undress, and share intimacy. It's important these familiar associations are maintained while also considering design enhancements that support both the person with dementia and carers.

Start with a comfortable bed that caters for any particular health conditions and personal preference and make it more obvious as a destination with brightly coloured covers. As mentioned, ensuring the ensuite toilet is visible when in bed can help with going to the toilet, especially at night.

To promote better sleep (covered in more detail in Chapter 6) a warm, cosy bed in a cooler, darkened room will make it the place to be!



Having just a few choices of coordinated outfits can maximise independence.

What to do with wardrobes

Sometimes wardrobes full of clothes, shoes and other items can be overwhelming. We all have days where we stand in front trying to decide what to wear (or just find what we're looking for). The additional memory, planning and sensory challenges of dementia can make this a demoralising and frustrating task.

To make it easier to independently choose an outfit, try hanging the components together (e.g. shirt, trousers, jacket), laying them out the night before and/or having minimal clothing in the wardrobe.

To help with remembering where clothes are, one solid door could be replaced with a glazed one (but be careful with reflection) so clothes are visible. Then hang the clothes for the day (or evening) behind the glazed door, so it becomes even easier to get dressed.

As mentioned throughout this book, signs with pictures and text are often most effective, so consider labelling drawers, cupboards and wardrobe doors to reduce confusion or frustration.

Assistive technology

Depending on the sleeping arrangements in the home, one of the varieties of bed-related sensors may give carers some reassurance if they are concerned about the person with dementia falling or walking around at night in an unsafe way.

Key points:

- Bathrooms are best warm, non-slip, with robust contrasting rails and good colour contrast for the toilet seat—and paper easily reached!
- Make finding the toilet easier with good signs and lighting—an ensuite can help!
- Preserve the privacy and intimacy of the bedroom while introducing subtle design ideas to support independence.
- Wardrobes and choosing clothing can be overwhelming so reduce options and use a glazed door to make clothes obvious.
- Be aware that mirrors and other reflective surfaces can alarm some people with dementia so consider ways to cover.
- Sometimes filling in the gaps in a process can help the person with dementia complete tasks independently.