

# Adapting Your Home

Supporting people in their home environment



**ALZHEIMER'S RESTRICTS  
AUSTRALIA ENABLES**

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**DEEP:** The Dementia Enabling Environment Project offers a range of initiatives to translate research and guidelines into practice in the area of dementia and the built environment.

The Adapting Your Home workshop and book are full of useful ideas, tips and advice on how to easily adapt your home to provide a safer and more enabling environment for the person you care for.

**For more information:**  
[www.enablingenvironments.com.au](http://www.enablingenvironments.com.au)

**email:** [deep@alzheimers.org.au](mailto:deep@alzheimers.org.au)  
[facebook.com/dementiaenablingenvironments](https://facebook.com/dementiaenablingenvironments)

# PRINCIPLES

The Dementia Enabling Environment Principles are based on the work of Prof. Richard Fleming and Kirsty Bennett, University of Wollongong. These principles have an evidence base and have been constructed from reviewing the research literature of studies looking at maximising enablement and wellbeing for people living with dementia through physical design.

These principles are an extension of work first published in 1987(1) and continued in 2003(2).

The Principles relate to the creating of environments that support and maintain the abilities of people with dementia.

- 1. Unobtrusively reduce risks**  
Maintaining a safe and secure environment
- 2. Provide a human scale**  
Consideration for personal space and social participation within the home
- 3. Allow people to see and be seen**  
Providing easy visual access for identifying items of need and supporting way finding
- 4. Reduce unhelpful stimulation**  
Noise levels and multiple visuals can cause agitation

# PRINCIPLES

- 5. Optimise helpful stimulation**  
Use of colour contrasts for easy identification of furnishings, doors and handles, wall and floor coverings and bathroom accessories
- 6. Support movement and engagement**  
Provide for safe walking by providing a well defined pathway, free of obstacles and complex decision points, that guides people past points of interest and opportunities to engage in activities or social interaction
- 7. Create a familiar space**  
Consider design that is familiar to the person for recognition, use and purpose
- 8. Provide opportunities to be alone or with others**  
Balance social participation and quiet time for the person and their carer. Support interests and encourage meaningful engagement with friends and family within the community
- 9. Maintain relationships and provide links to the community**  
Frequent interaction with friends and relatives can help to maintain a sense of identity
- 10. Respond to a vision for way of life**  
The environment should support the person with dementia to lead a life that has meaning and value to them

# ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Research suggests that the environment can help a person with dementia hold onto their world by maintaining ties with familiar and comfortable surroundings (Cohen & Day, 1988).

It is widely recognised that the environment can have a significant positive or negative effect on a person with dementia.

The enabling environment is one that promotes independence and supports well being.

- Familiar surroundings
- Allows for easy access and orientation within their home environment
- Supports meaningful skills/tasks
- Supports participation in daily activities
- Promotes safety, security and independence
- Provides comfort



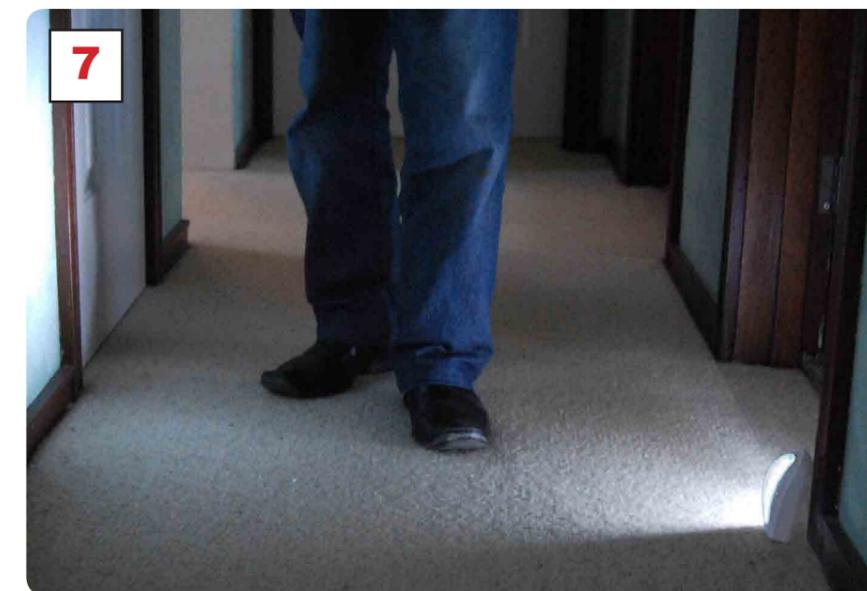
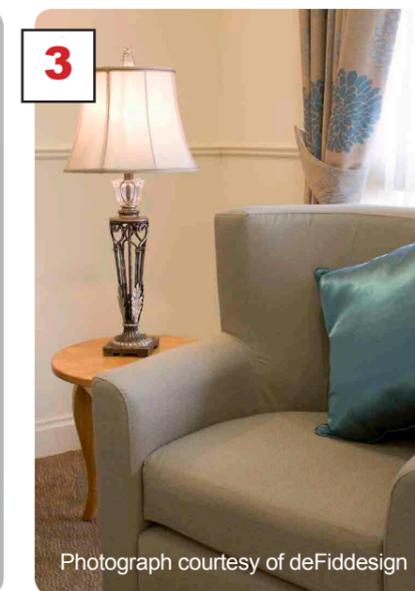
# PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider the physical and sensory changes to the person and/or carer
- Allow the person to make choices and decisions in a timely manner
- Consider the best time of day for the person to discuss changes to their home environment
- Balance social participation and quiet time for the person and their carer
- Provide orientation cues and prompts that are suitable and appropriate
- Ensure well being and identity is maintained
- Support and encourage meaningful engagement
- Ensure that the person feels valued and included



# HOW TO IMPROVE LIGHTING

1. Replace current globes with brighter globes to support good lighting within the home
2. Open curtains/blinds fully to maximise the daylight within individual rooms
3. Position seating for reading activities to take advantage of sunlight
4. Installing skylights may be an option for rooms that are dark, or do not appear to have sufficient natural light for performing activities, or are not visually accessible
5. Different window treatments may be required to reduce glare and shadows during day or night
6. Consider using additional lighting such as floor/reading lamps when performing tasks such as reading
7. Sensor lighting can reduce the risk of falls at night



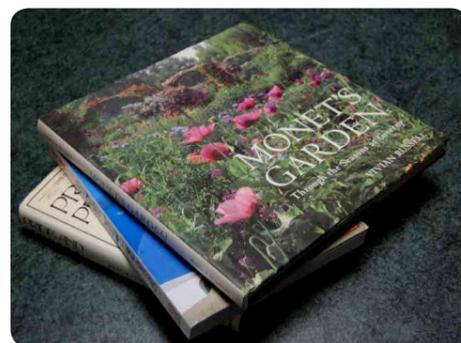
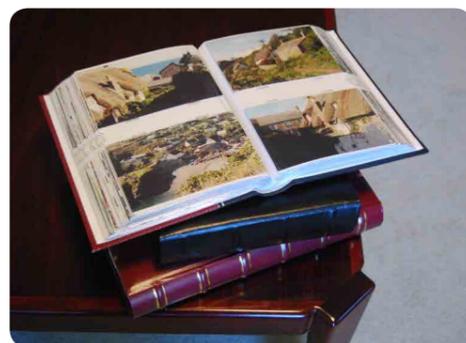
# THE LOUNGE ROOM

1. Provide adequate lighting such as lamps and opening curtains for natural lighting
2. Create an opportunity for a quiet space to sit, relax or read
3. Ensure access within the room to perform meaningful activities
4. Personal photos and items around the room provide pleasant memories and opportunity for reminiscence
5. Different texture and colours in living room provide sensory engagement e.g. knitted rug, soft cushions
6. Reduce clutter and remove potential hazards such as loose electrical cords or rugs, and provide storage for items to ensure sufficient space to move around
7. Contrasting colours for floor, walls and furnishings for visual identification

Room temperature and sufficient airflow creates a comfortable environment

Furniture coverings should be comfortable and durable

Avoid sharp or protruding edges and furniture with glass to reduce hazards



# THE KITCHEN

1. Ensure there is sufficient room and lighting (over head lighting and under cupboard lighting) to perform tasks in the kitchen
2. Place regularly used items in line of sight and group common items together
3. Use labels /clear canisters to help locate items
4. Utilise safety monitoring devices when cooking and performing other tasks in the kitchen
5. Use labels on cupboards or replace solid doors with see-through ones to easily view items
6. Replace appliances that are not working with ones similar of design to support familiarity
7. Use flood detectors, monitors and thermostat controls to reduce hazards or risks
8. Utilise whiteboard and calendar clock for orientation and important reminders
9. Use taps that are familiar and easy to use for the person

Use safety RCD switches and place a smoke alarm outside the kitchen area



# SETTING UP THE KITCHEN



This kitchen gives the example of using labels and clear cupboard doors to enable a person to see and find items.

Place regular used items in line of sight and group common items together.



- Breakfast cereal boxes
- Tea coffee sugar, cup and kettle
- Bread container and toaster

# SETTING UP THE KITCHEN



Visual prompts and sequence order can promote and support a person to take part in daily domestic activities e.g. moving left to right, wash and dry the dishes and put on the shelf.

The “kettle cradle” reduces the risk of scalds and spills, and modified cutlery can be useful for people who need this kind of adaptive cutlery for meal preparation.



# THE DINING ROOM

1. Contrasting colours for floor, walls and furnishings enables a person to visually identify the dining area within the home
2. Consider using contrasting colours for table setting and crockery- place mats, plates, table cloth and glassware, e.g. a bright red place mat defines the persons eating area
3. Ensure that there is adequate lighting during meal times such as using over head lighting, opening curtains, side lamps and wall lighting
4. Keep table settings simple and select suitable background music to create a pleasant atmosphere promoting open communication
5. Table settings should be simple and not distracting

Ensure room temperature creates a comfortable environment. 

Adaptive cutlery and crockery can assist some people during meal times. 



# SETTING UP THE DINING ROOM



These are examples of a dining experience where there is colour contrast with chairs, table, flooring, table cloth, plates, placemats, tea cups and saucers, which allows the diners to **easy** identify items for use.

A small vase with flowers creates familiarity and scent also adding to the comfort of the dining experience.



Good examples of colour contrast of walls, floors and furnishings, recognition of room, natural daylight, and comfortable seating.



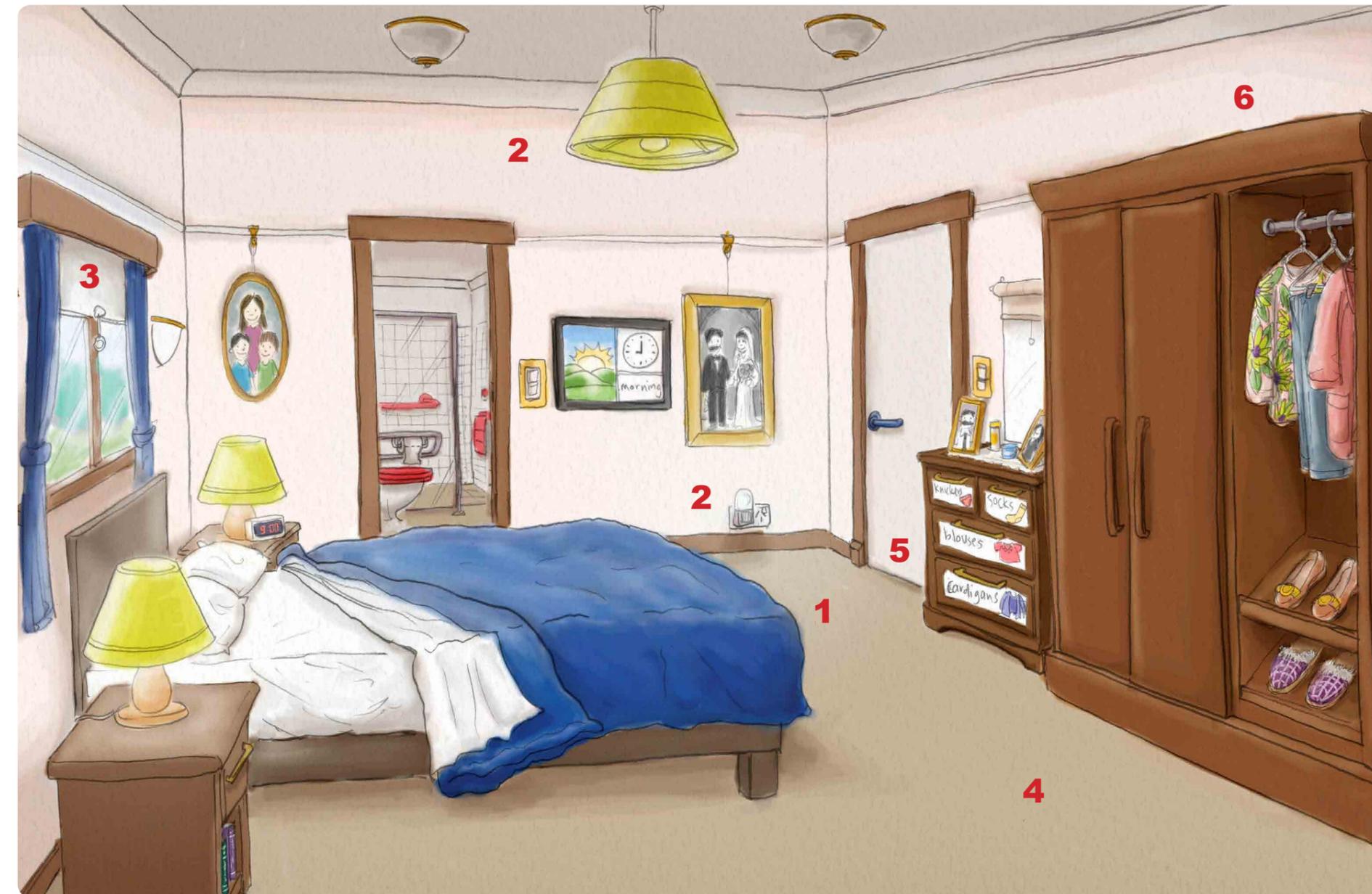
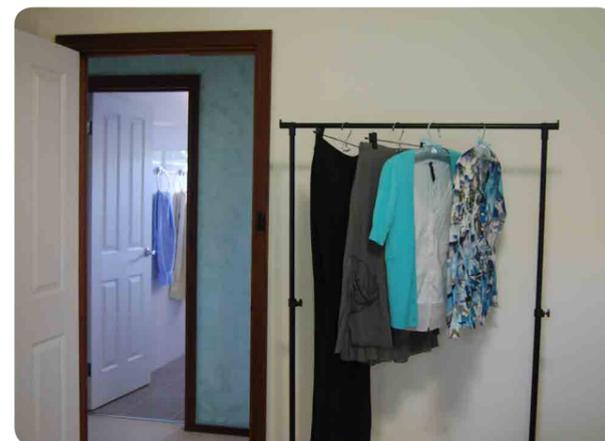
Photograph courtesy of deFiddesign



# THE BEDROOM

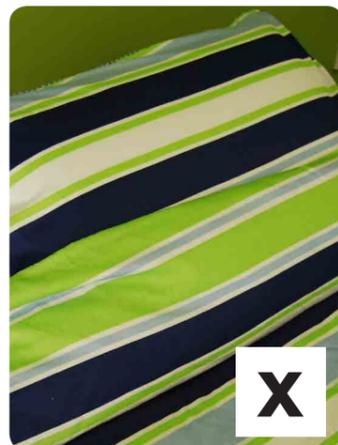
1. Contrasting colours for floor, walls, furnishings and bedding enables a person to visually identify the bedroom within the home
2. Ensure that there is adequate lighting during dressing such as using over head lighting, side lamps, wall lighting and sensor lighting. Sensor lighting can reduce the risk of falls at night time
3. Use block out curtains or blinds to regulate sleeping patterns and stop shadows appearing on the window from outside trees and shrubs
4. Remove clutter within the bedroom to ensure clear pathways, e.g. chairs, tables, clothes, shoes, rugs
5. Use labels where necessary to identify items in drawers and cupboards in the bedroom
6. Display a selection of daily clothing and shoes (season and appropriate dress) on a stand for easy access, promoting decision making and supporting independence

Room temperature and sufficient airflow creates a comfortable environment

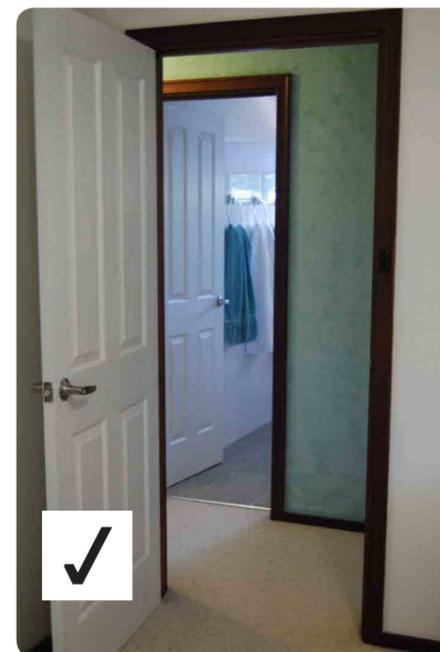


# SETTING UP THE BEDROOM

- A direct line of sight from the bed to the bathroom / toilet helps with visual orientation
- To create a sense of privacy ensure that curtains and blinds are drawn when dressing
- Place orientation clock in optimum position for easy viewing
- Avoid strong and bold patterns, as wavy or striped patterns can appear to be moving to a person with dementia
- Some people may not recognise their reflection **in mirror**, or understand what is real and what is a reflection. For some people a mirror may need to be covered or removed



Where possible keep floor colours the same or similar, to avoid the appearance of floor level changes.



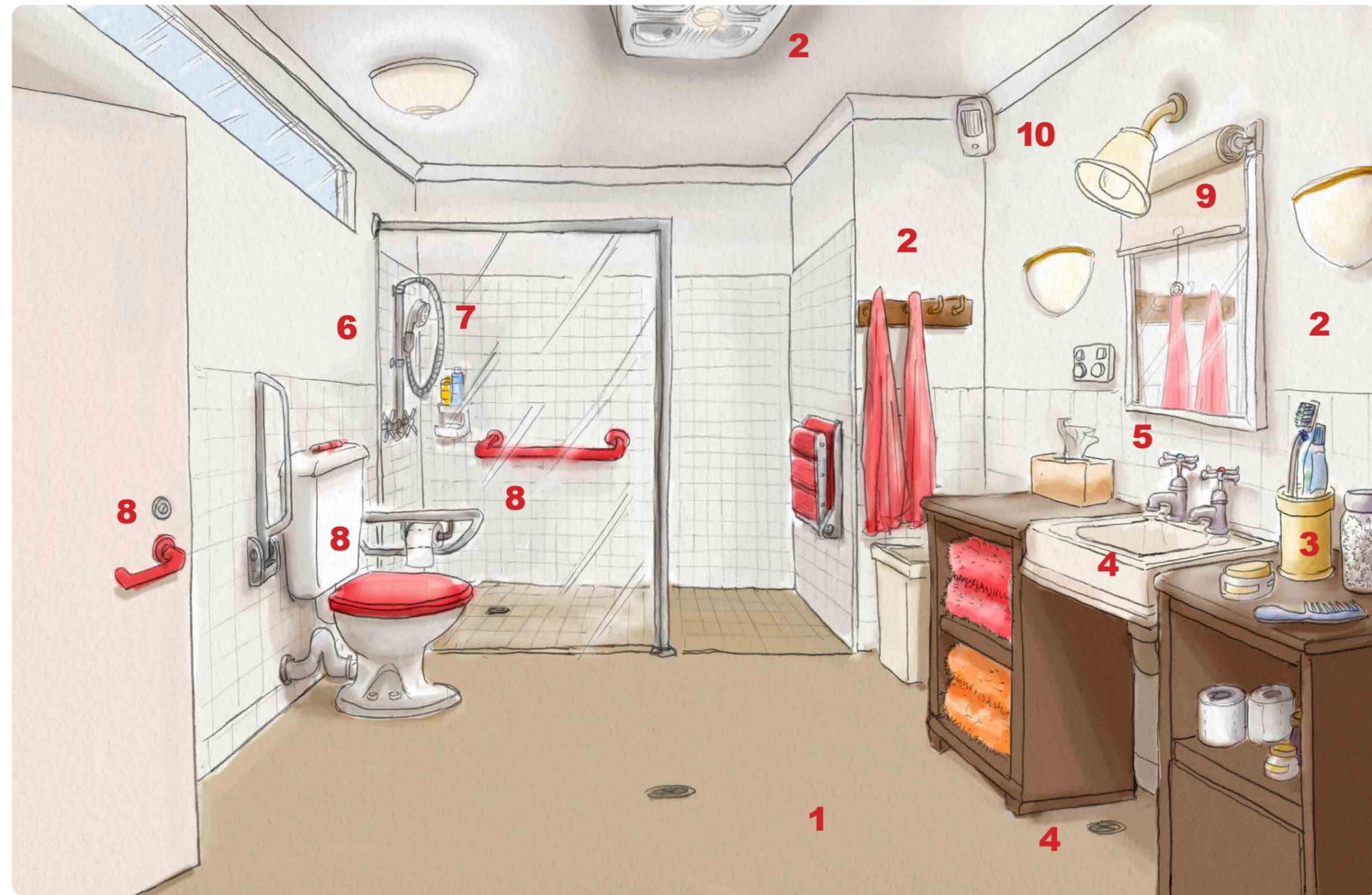
Direct line of sight from the bed to the bathroom/ toilet.

Create opportunity for decision making by displaying a choice of clothes and shoes.

Way finding around a room with a huge mirror may be confusing and distressing for a person with dementia.

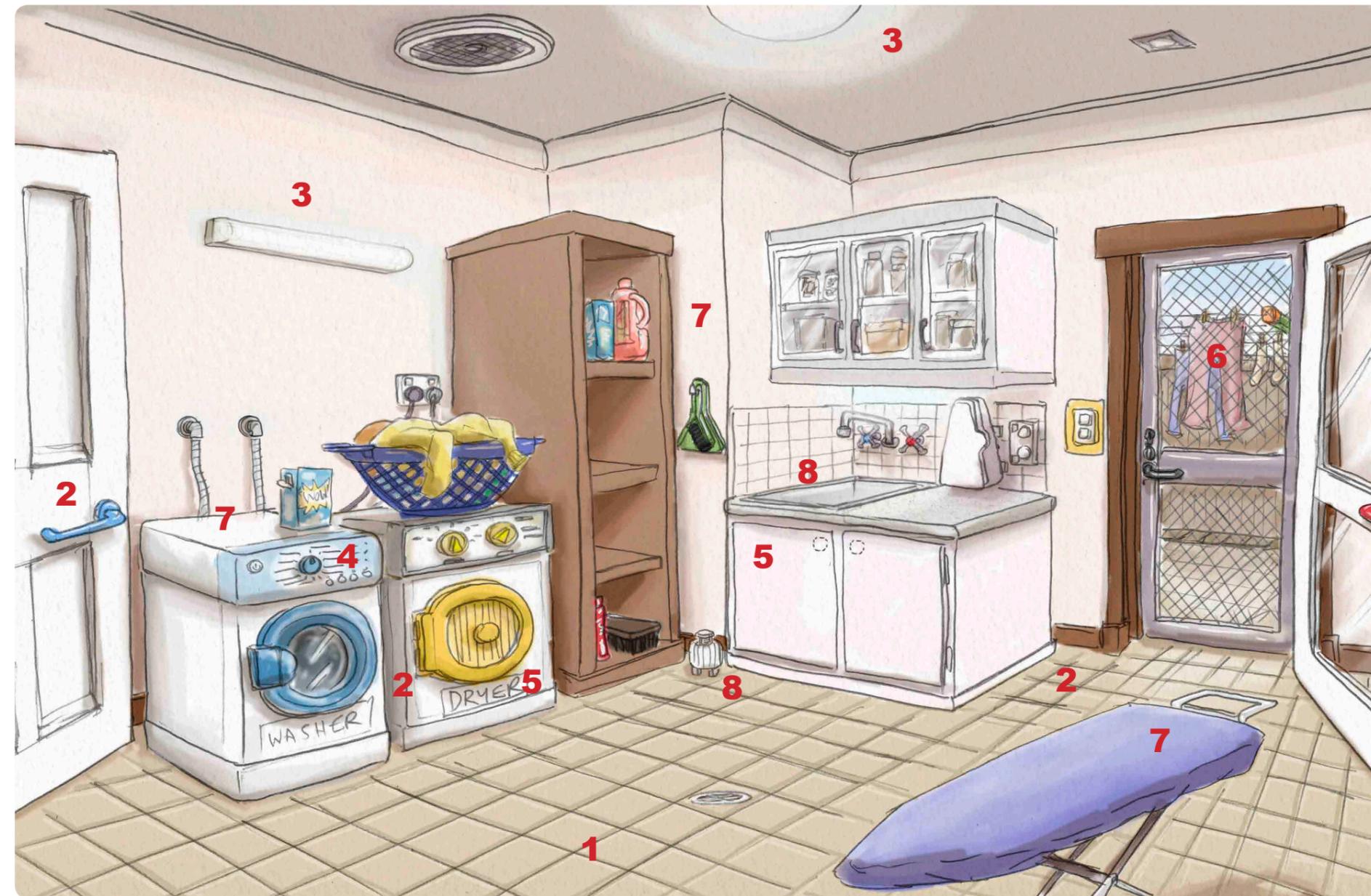
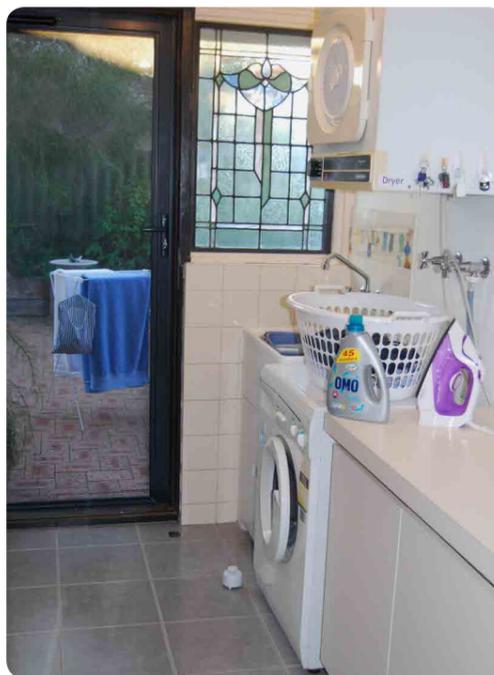
# THE BATHROOM

1. Remove rugs and ensure flooring is a non-slip surface
2. Consider warmer colour tones for floor and walls and ensure that room temperature is comfortable when using the bathroom
3. Place regular used items in a group within line of sight and at a height that is accessible
4. Use anti flood devices and ensure that drainage holes are clear to reduce risks
5. Cold/hot indicators on taps should be clearly identified to reduce hazards
6. Install thermostat or hot water cut off devices to regulate and monitor hot water temperature
7. Use of hand held shower hose and shower chair if necessary to provide safe showering
8. Use colour contrast to highlight items such as bath rail, door handle and toilet seat
9. Some people lose the ability to differentiate between what they see in the mirror (themselves or you) and reality. You may need to cover the mirror, or remove it if it causes distress
10. Install sensor lighting to provide effective orientation **into bathroom** at night



# THE LAUNDRY

1. Ensure the floor is a non-slip matte (non glossy) surface to avoid glare and reflections
2. Ensure there is colour contrast between walls, skirting, floors, door handles and laundry appliances
3. Ensure there is adequate task lighting to perform various chores within the laundry
4. Use appliances that are familiar to the person and if they need to be replaced they should be of a similar model that operates the same way
5. Use clear labels for on/off switch and other regular used items in the laundry
6. Ensure that the clothes line is visible from the laundry so it can be easily identified and prompts the person for the task
7. Remove excess clutter and store frequently used items in line of sight
8. Install flood prevention and detection devices to reduce hazards or risks



# THE GARDEN

1. Ensure safe and clear pathways within the garden considering overhanging branches, plants with thorns, moss, mould, uneven or broken pavers or loose gravel
2. Careful selection of plants as there many varieties that are poisonous when in contact with the skin (See useful websites & resources page 33)
3. Consider planting seasonal or all year round flowering plants
4. Ensure that there are shade areas to relax in, to sit or read a book
5. Create an opportunity to grow a vegetable or herb garden
6. Water features can add an extra dimension to the garden however some may require more maintenance than others - careful selection is required
7. Steps leading into the garden or in the garden area need to be in good condition with easy and safe access with support rails if required. Ensure that steps have good visibility from top step to bottom



# THE GARDEN

Being outdoors and amongst nature can create enjoyment with therapeutic benefits such as:

- Opportunities for performing meaningful activities in the garden area or inside the shed
- An area for rest, socialisation and recreational activities
- Opportunity for walking and exercise
- Providing emotional and spiritual well being
- Improving hormone balance and restoring normal resting heart rate



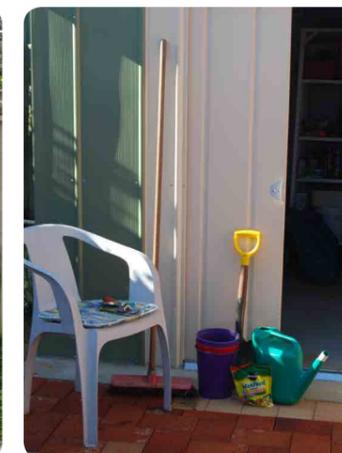
## Include meaningful activity in and around the garden



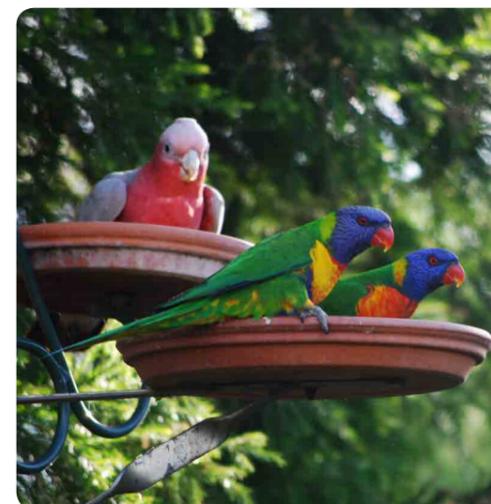
Provide garden beds of different heights for easy access.



Garden tools can prompt and encourage a person to work in the garden.



Growing your own vegies can be a rewarding and enjoyable activity.



Enjoy local bird life by providing bird baths and feeders.



It is really enjoyable to share common interests with another.



Provide opportunity to sit and relax and enjoy being outdoors.

Develop your garden to stimulate the five senses with the use of colour, scent, texture and sound



Plan seasonal plants to keep colour in your garden all year round.



Include plants that attract the local bird life.



Enjoy a variety of colours and plants of different heights.



Grasses like these are lovely and soft to touch.



Choose contrasting colours for variety and visual stimulation.



Succulents' have many shapes and colours, ideal for hot climates, interesting to touch.



Jasmine and other plants provide aromatic benefits.



A water feature can be gentle and soothing.

# SENSORY PLANTING LIST

## SMELL

*Plumeria obtusa*  
Frangipani  
\*Sticky sap is poisonous

*Aloysia triphylla*  
Lemon verbena

*Lavandula angustifolia*  
English Lavender

*Pelargonium graveolens*  
Scented Rose Geranium

*Jasminum officinale*  
Common white Jasmine



## TOUCH

*Dracaena draco*  
Dragon Tree  
\*Low toxic

*Carex albescens*  
Frosted Curls

*Senecio mandraliscae*  
Blue Fingers  
\*Toxic to animals

*Phormium tenax*  
New Zealand Flax

*Sedum spectabile*  
Showy Everlasting



## SOUND

*Ficinia nodosa*  
*Isolepis*  
Knobby club rush

*Calamagrostis acutiflora*  
Arctic Reedgrass

*Pennisetum alopecuroides*  
Fountain Grass

*Pennisetum alopecuroides*  
Nafray

*Miscanthus sinensis*  
*Gracillimus*  
Maiden Grass



## TASTE

*Mentha*  
Mint

*Coriandrum sativum*  
Coriander

*Citrus limon*  
Lemon tree

*Rosmarinus officinalis*  
Rosemary

*Lycopersicon esculentum*  
Tomato



## VISION

*Lampranthus aurantiacus*  
Trailing Ice Plant

*Cordyline terminalis*  
Red sister

*Kalanchoe thyrsiflora*  
Flap Jacks

*Thornless Roses*  
Smooth Buttercup (Yellow)

Zepherine Drouhin (Red climber)



# THE GARDEN SHED

**\*Identify hazards and reduce risks to promote safe walking in the garden and support enjoyment working in the garden shed.**

1. If identified as a hazard for the person, remove chemicals, pesticides and electrical items
2. Ensure the shed is easily accessible and items such as a broom and rake are within easy reach
3. If possible, ample shade and seating in, or outside the shed, and keep a sun hat handy
4. Storage containers with labels for easy identification



Keep the interior tidy, and walk areas free of clutter.



Use shelving to keep daily used items within easy reach.



Keep a table to put things on and a chair for comfort. If there is no shade, it's a good idea to keep a sun hat close by.



**Storage:** Labelling helps a person to find things easily.

# USEFUL WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

**DEEP – Dementia Enabling Environments**  
[www.enablingenvironments.com.au](http://www.enablingenvironments.com.au)

**Dementia Services Development Centre University of Stirling UK**  
<http://dementia.stir.ac.uk/virtualhome>

**The Eldercare Team Mirrors and Dementia**  
<http://www.eldercareteam.com>

**This Caring Home– Home Safety : Virtual Home**  
[http://www.thiscaringhome.org/virtual\\_home/default.aspx](http://www.thiscaringhome.org/virtual_home/default.aspx)

**Gardens that Care**  
[www.designwell.com.au](http://www.designwell.com.au)

**Water Corporation**  
[www.watercorporation.com.au/w/waterwise\\_gardens](http://www.watercorporation.com.au/w/waterwise_gardens)

**Poisonous Plants**  
<http://www.gtp.com.au/kidsafesa/inewsfiles>  
<http://eclectusparrots.net/safeplants.html>

**Independent Living Centre**  
Tel: 1300 885 886 [www.ilcaustralia.org](http://www.ilcaustralia.org)

**Alzheimer's Australia**  
Our libraries have a wide range of information and resources  
Tel: 1800 100 500 [www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au)

## REFERENCES

1. Fleming R, Bowles J.  
Units for the confused and disturbed elderly: Development, design, Programming and Evaluation.  
Australian Journal on Aging. 1987 November; 6 (4):25-8
2. Fleming R, Forbes I, Bennett K.  
Adapting the ward for people with dementia. Sydney: NSW Department of Health; 2003

## HOME SAFETY CHECK LIST

	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Does the person with dementia have visual disturbances?			
Does the carer or person with dementia have a vision loss?			
Does the carer or person with dementia have a hearing loss?			
Does the carer or person with dementia have a physical disability?			
<b>KITCHEN</b>	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Do you have an isolation switch on your main power board?			
Electrical gas safety cut off device for the stove/oven			
Plug-in gas alarms, gas detector/cut off device			
Saucepans and handles in good condition (no wobbly handles)			
Electrical cords, outlets, switches needing repairs			
Hot water temperature thermostat controlled			
Flood detector / pressure release plug for kitchen sink			
Broken floor tiles, frayed lino, floor covering lifting			
Access and easy movement around the room?			
Is there clutter on the work bench?(Remove or make tidy, make it easier to find things)			
Easy to locate cupboard items (glass doors, labels, signs on see through containers)			
Cupboard handles – are they easy to identify and grab to open? D shaped handles)			
Expiry date labels on food- (check and throw out expired food items)			
Is there sufficient lighting and space to perform tasks?			
Broken light globes			
Wireless smoke detector – not directly placed in kitchen but close by			
Microwave with clear simple buttons			
If required, have you considered a kettle cradle to reduce scalds and spills?			

<b>BATHROOM</b>	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Does the floor have a slope to the drain outlet?			
Is the floor slippery when wet or in general?			
Are there any loose or broken floor tiles?			
Are there mats or floor coverings which could be a trip hazard? Check non slip backing			
Do you have a bathroom light/heat lamp combination unit?			
Are the shower products and regular used items within easy reach?			
Is a handrail required for safety around the shower or toilet? (O.T. can assist)			
Is the toilet an appropriate height for the person? Can they reach the toilet paper easily?			
Is there easy access into the shower? If required, is there room for a shower chair/ stool?			
Is there an exhaust fan? (Steam / condensation can make the floor slippery)			
Is the lighting bright and adequate?			
<b>BEDROOM</b>			
Are the floor coverings intact? (no lifting carpet or link, cracked boards)			
Is there adequate lighting in the bedroom?			
Is there a sensor light? (Useful in falls prevention and night time orientation)			
Are there mats or rugs that could be a trip hazard?			
Is there the ability to adjust temperature in the bedroom?			
Can the person easily see where the toilet is or how to get there from the bedroom?			
Are electrical cords out of the way of walking areas?			
Do they have an electric blanket? If yes, has it had a safety check by the electrician?			
Is there easy movement around the room? (remove clutter from walk areas)			
Is the bed the correct height? Is there a risk of falling?			
Are clothes and footwear easily accessible?			
Are there any sharp or protruding furniture edges that may cause injury? If so have you considered safety pads?			
Are there trees that cast shadows on your bedroom windows? Have you considered block out curtains?			

<b>LOUNGE AND LIVING AREA</b>	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Do the chair's arm rests have firm cushions? (To push up from, easier to get up)			
Difficulty sit to stand, falls risk identified, are the chairs appropriate height? (Occupational Therapist can assist- see GP for ACAT/HACC assessment)			
Are there curtains and blinds? ( to clock out sun and glare when required)			
Is there suitable lighting with high watt globes and natural light?			
Can the person use the TV remote? Does it have large buttons?			
Sharp or protruding edges on furniture, or glass table tops that may cause injury?			
Can the person easily and quickly get to the toilet?			
Are there any rugs or mats on the floor?			
Is there any clutter or electrical cords that block space to move around?			
<b>ENTRANCES AND EXITS</b>			
Pathways in good condition – (no pavers lifting, no unlevel areas or loose gravel)			
Steps – level and clear of garden leaves / rubble			
Steps – is the lighting even and bright in the day and night?			
Steps – is a hand rail required to reduce falls risk?			
Steps – do they have good visibility from top step to bottom?			
Security doors in good condition			
Security for the home e.g. Key Safe to keep spare house keys			
Mail box – lockable – easy access from the front door			

<b>GARDEN AND SHED</b>			
Even level pathway and walk area			
Garden paths clear of loose stones, garden litter and rubble			
Prune over hanging tree branches and shrubs			
Items that a person can use safely within easy reach e.g. broom, watering can, trowel			
Is there a table/bench and chair for the person to work?			
Is there a shaded area for the person to sit and relax?			
<b>HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED HAZARDS?</b>			
Do you need to remove chemicals, pesticides and sprays?			
Do you need to remove electrical equipment, sharp tools and machinery?			
Do you need to remove any poisonous plants?			
<b>ALCOHOL, MEDICATIONS AND CHEMICALS</b>			
Lockable cabinet / safe storage of alcohol			
Lockable cabinet / storage of medications			
Medication dispenser? Medication reminder?			
Lockable cabinet for safe chemical storage			