



Making a Home User Friendly for People with Dementia

Dementia can create serious challenges not only for the person who has it, but for people who are trying to help. People with dementia have a wide variety of cognitive difficulties that create different challenges through advancing years. Eventually, dementia can make living at home unsafe or hazardous.

Planning "user friendly features" for a person with dementia requires continual assessment and re-assessment to observe for functional changes that could affect safety. To assure safety and prevent the possibility of injuries, it is very important to be able to rapidly recognize cognitive changes that affect function and safety in the home. Once these factors are identified, it is very important to make the right adjustments as quickly as possible.

While there are no simple rules that can be followed at any one time for all people with dementia, there are things that can be considered as changes occur. To remain living safely at home, the home has to fit the people living in it. Dementia is very complicated. It can be extremely beneficial to confer with an occupational therapist (OT) to learn about ideas, options and modifications that can make a home user friendly for the family and the person with dementia. The OT does the following:

Evaluates the person, the home and the situation, collaborates with the family, then makes a variety of recommendations designed to improve safety, comfort and function for the person with dementia as well as caregivers and other members of the family.

Develops new routines for a person with dementia that enables the person to continue valued or precious routines on his or her own.

Identifies needed home modifications or other creative adjustments that will promote or facilitate safety and performance

Teaches individuals and caregivers to implement home modifications to support safety and capabilities including ways to create simple and clear passageways, prevent self injury, reduce unsafe wandering, etc.

Recommends special assistive devices to prevent falls or reduce the potential for self injury.

Trains caregivers on strategies to maximize abilities and find ways to manage caregiver stress.

For more information about occupational therapists, refer to www.aota.org