

## **VISUAL DYSFUNCTION IN DEMENTIA Home Safety Tips & Recommendations**

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There are several types of dementia that impact a person's vision; not because of an eye problem but because of a brain problem. They have a lot of problems seeing shades of the same colour and have increased success when there is a high degree of contrast – such as black on yellow.

The types of dementia that have an impact on vision are:

- Posterior cortical atrophy
- Corticobasal degeneration
- Dementia with Lewy bodies

Here are a few tips to optimize a person's safety and independence in their own home.

### GENERAL ENVIRONMENT:

#### ➤ Simplify the environment

- Remove clutter and objects no longer in use; keep pathways clear.
- Remove unsafe furniture and accents: i.e. low height stools, chairs or tables.
- Options to decrease the potential falls risk from scatter rugs and door mats:
  - Remove unsafe scatter rugs/mats
  - Install non-slip under-padding
  - Replace with rugs/mats with a rubber backing
  - Secure all edges with double sided carpet tape (not for outdoor use)
- Relocate and secure trailing cords that are in high traffic areas.
- Ensure adequate lighting: use night lights, install extra lights fixtures.
- Leave lights on prior to nightfall.
- Diffuse bright light areas. Reduce glare by covering windows with blinds, shades or sheer curtains to block direct bright sunlight. Avoid using bare light bulbs without shades.
- Obtain a door alarm and /or safety lock.
- Place stickers on large glass windows or large glass doors to prevent people from bumping or walking into to them.

#### ➤ Increase contrast

- Label room doors; use yellow paper with black writing.
- Paint doorframes and light switch plates in a contrasting colour to the wall.
- Contrasting colour dot to mark the number/button to release automatic door.
- Contrasting colour strips (paint or tape) or tactile cue at top and bottom of stairs, as well as on the edge of each individual step (both inside and outside).

- Use contrasting coloured adhesive strips to mark pathways to important areas – bathroom, kitchen, living room, laundry.

#### KITCHEN:

- Mark burners and stove dials with contrasting colour to make it easier to identify and to know when elements are hot.
- Dials at the front of the stove are more desirable than dials at the back of the stove in order to avoid reaching over the elements.
- Mark frequently used settings on the oven or other dials (e.g. 350 degrees or normal cycle for the dishwasher) with a bumper dot or contrasting tactile marker.
- Supervise the person while using the stove, and if necessary, disconnect the stove and other appliances when they are home alone.
- Mark the 1-minute button on the microwave with a contrasting colour bumper dot, tactile marker, bright tape or nail polish.
- Place cleaning supplies away from food supplies \*\*\*\* very important\*\*\*\*
- Dispose of hazardous substances that are no longer needed and store other potentially hazardous substances in secured storage (locked cupboard, childproof door locks).
- Keep cupboard doors and drawers closed at all times and ensure everything is put away in its proper place.
- Problem-solve an appropriate organizational structure to the kitchen; consider having one designated area of counter space for preferred and usual foods. Trial placing frequently used items on a contrasting mat or tray, located in the same place every day. This is in an attempt to increase independence in finding items and participating in meal preparation.
- Store/relocate frequently used items at accessible and visible level.
- Keep counters clear and minimize clutter.
- Consider using appliances with automatic shut-off; i.e., kettle.
- Other items to optimize safety, independence and participation in the kitchen:
  - Elbow-length oven mitts to ensure maximum protection.
  - Knife guard aid to enable safe use and pressure when cutting.
  - Cutting board with a black side and a white side to enhance contrast while cutting.
  - Gooseneck lamp above the cutting area may also assist with vision.
  - Large print timer.
  - Liquid measure tool to assist in pouring liquids and avoid spills
  - Re-label jars and canned goods using a thick black marker, white recipe card, single words, and elastic bands.
  - *Penfriend Audio Labeler* or similar

#### Eating:

- Use bright coloured contrasting dishes and ensure they are all one solid colour (no patterns and no ridged edges).
- Use a dark solid-coloured placemat if using light-coloured plates and use a light solid-coloured placemat if using dark plates.
- Light-coloured food will be easier to see on a solid dark-coloured dish and dark food on a light dish.

- Avoid patterned table clothes.
- Maintain a strict pattern for mealtime set-up. For example, always place the same utensils, drinking glass and condiments in the same place for every meal.
- Avoid cluttering the eating area and only have necessary items within reach.
- Use verbal directions as reminders of where items are located; i.e., “your glass is on your right,” and “salt and pepper is on your left.”
- Use plate guards during meal times

#### BEDROOM:

- Use bright, contrasting colour fitted sheet, top sheet, pillow cases. Each should be a different colour to optimize identification and orientation to and within the bed.
- Place a bright coloured mat on nightstand to contrast against items placed on it.

#### Dressing:

- Label drawers and shelves with high contrast wording or pictures.
- Remove clothes that are no longer being used; including permanent removal of clothes no longer worn and temporary storage of out-of-season clothing.
- Simplify and organize arrangement of clothing; for example, group similar items together, one drawer for shirts and another drawer for pants.
- Lay out clothing for the day
- Minimize clothing requiring buttons and zippers and replace with elastic waists, pull-over/on, and loose clothing.
- Pin socks together when placing them in the laundry so they will stay matched.

#### BATHROOM:

- Reduce clutter on bathroom floor, countertop, in drawers and cabinets.
- Use high-contrast non-slip bath mat and install high-contrast grab bars in the shower or bathtub; use contrasting tactile strip on existing grab bars to differentiate from tub or towel bar.
- Pick up bathmat after each use and store appropriately to prevent falls.
- If there is noted difficulty accurately locating the toilet you may consider obtaining a toilet seat in a contrasting bright colour. Also consider obtaining a raised toilet seat with arms and the tape arms with a bright colour in contrast against the toilet seat.
- Tape toilet-flushing handle in a contrasting bright colour.
- Label important areas in the bathroom: toilet, sink, bathroom door (yellow paper with black writing).
- Tape sink faucet handles with bright colour tape (use primary colour such as red, green, blue) to distinguish handle from the rest of the sink.
- Keep soap in a bright container (i.e., red) with contrasting colour soap (i.e, white).
- Use sign as reminder to wash hands, flush toilet, brush teeth etc.
- Keep frequently used items (toothbrush, paste) in small shallow basket or on a mat to contrast items against the counter.
- Use toothpaste that contrasts in colour to the toothbrush and bristles: i.e. red toothpaste on white brush and bristles.

- Cover mirrors if necessary: often people with vision problems may not be able to recognize the item as a mirror.

*Personal Care:*

- Nails: Ensure nail care is done by a professional. Can be provided in-home.
- Footwear: Ensure appropriate footwear is used: flat, non-slip sole, enclosed toe and heel, Velcro fasteners.

MEDICATION ROUTINE:

- Supervision of medication routine is usually recommended.
- Store medications in a secure place.
- Remove and properly dispose of medications that are no longer needed or have expired.
- Inquire whether the medication routine can be simplified (i.e., to once-a-day instead of three times a day).
- Other ways to simplify a meds routine: Pre-filled blister packs; dosette; list of current medications; medication schedule; medication alarms/reminders.

STAIRS:

- Ensure adequate lighting on the stairs; with switches at both the top and bottom.
- Install secure railings on at least one if not both sides.
- Install railing extensions beyond the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Remove or replace unsafe flooring with a non-slip surface.
- Contrasting coloured tape or paint on the edge of each step.
- Contrasting coloured tape or paint and/or tactile strip at the top and bottom of the stairs.

*Progression:*

- Safety gate to prevent use of stairs
- Arrange living area on one level

COMMUNICATION & SCHEDULING:

- Use a phone with large print and high contrast numbers, as well as one-touch programmable numbers.
- Program emergency and frequently used numbers to the one-touch programmable numbers and add tactile markers to increase ease of identification.
- Set up a “memory centre” with the phone, keys, note pad, whiteboard with large writing area and black marker.
- Include a paper, pen/pencil and task lamp beside the phone for messages.
- Place telephone on bright contrasting colour mat.
- Use contrasting coloured tape to outline phone cradle.
- If possible, utilize a service that requires voice activation for phone dialling.
- Use talking watches or clocks to indicate the time and appointments.