

Activity: Managing symptoms

Memory loss is one of the earliest signs of dementia. The purpose of this exercise is to illustrate how a care worker can make a real difference in helping a person with dementia to manage the symptoms and live well with dementia.

Think about a person you are caring for who is in the early stage of dementia or is having difficulties with memory issues.

Start by looking around their home and try to identify any memory aids that might help. You might find it easier if you divide the home into rooms.

For example, look around the hallway/entry area. Useful memory aids might be:

- a place where a person can leave their keys (a hook, dish, shelf)
- labelling keys with a different colour (red = front door, black = shed door)
- a memory board to remind a person of key things before going out (reminders for purses and wallets and keys and that lights, cooker and taps have been turned off)
- an umbrella (to encourage a person to take it with them if it's raining).

Now in turn look at the kitchen, dining room, living room, bedrooms and bathroom.

Routines can help a person with dementia to stay in control of their life. Think about what a person with dementia does each day and how routines can help them live well with dementia. It may, for instance, be useful to link regular activities with certain days (say Monday is laundry day and Friday is family visit day). Also, think about linking activities to prompt a person's memory (such as linking breakfast with taking medication).

Trainer's notes

To support care workers with this exercise, encourage them to think about ways to prompt a person's memory. This may be an aid (like a memory board) or it could be using mnemonics (word association) as a prompt to remember a person's name (that is, Sally Webster, Coronation Street character). You may suggest linking days to colours to improve day recognition (Wednesdays are yellow and yellow is linked to bin collection day).

The following list may help but is not exhaustive:

- clocks that tell the date, day and time (and are visible day and night) can help keep a person orientated in time
- labels and signs using words, pictures or even sounds can help a person recognise things and find their way around their home
- calendars and diaries can be used as reminders for key appointments, visits and events
- establishing routines can be very helpful, for example keeping keys, purses and wallets in the same drawer and keeping bills and other important paperwork in the same place
- good use of colour can help (say, if the front door is green, put a green key fob on the front door key); colour can help distinguish things (for example, coloured toilet rolls and soaps will stand out in a white bathroom)

- pill dispensing boxes supplied by chemists can help organise medication by day or time
- notebooks with pens attached can be kept in handy places (such as next to the bed, in the kitchen, or by the phone).