



East Sussex
Fire & Rescue Service

Fire and Home Safety Information for people living with **Dementia** and their families and friends.



Introduction

We want to encourage people living with Dementia to continue to live safely and independently in their own homes.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue offer Home Safety Visits, which can include additional advice for people living with , or caring for those with Dementia.

We encourage another member of the family or a regular carer to be present during the home safety visit.

Dementia affects people in different ways, but can result in confusion, memory loss and disorientation. There may be reduced ability to finish thoughts or follow directions. There may be reduced mobility, hearing and sight loss, balance problems and loss of co-ordination. As the condition progresses, the person may struggle to perform familiar tasks, remember recent events or recognise potential dangers. If you have concerns regarding a friend or relative, in the first instance, contact their GP.

The following are all tips that may help to make a person with dementia safer in their home.

Thank you to all those who have kindly helped to review and update this leaflet.

We would like to give a special mention to Annie Page, Safe and Well advisor with ESFRS, Kate Russell from Chanctonbury Healthcare and Julie Barnett, Frailty and Dementia Coordinator for Lewes GP Surgeries.

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Mobility, Hearing and Sight issues



✓ Check list for the home:

- Reduce clutter if possible.** Too much clutter can add to confusion. For instance, a dark mat in front of a door may look like a hole in the floor to a person with dementia.
- Good lighting.** Dim or poor lighting can make a person with dementia feel “closed in”.
- Consider decorating** the home in contrasting colours to help the person recognise areas of a room or house more easily.
- Try using picture or word cards/labels** around the home to identify rooms, cupboards etc.
- Non-slip flooring.** Remove loose rugs and mats, seal up carpet edges and provide non-slip flooring.
- Clear pathways.** Ensure there is a clear path from the bedroom to the toilet/bathroom and to all exit doors and windows. Consider using plug-in night lights along the hall.



Kitchen Safety



A significant proportion of house fires start in the kitchen due to food being left unattended. People living with Dementia are susceptible to distraction, and forgetting to turn cookers/hobs off after cooking.



Check list for the home:



There are various assistive living devices on the market, such as automatic cut-offs for cookers.



Some people with dementia can forget how to use the microwave oven properly. For example, they may forget to take food out of a foil tray or set the timer for too long.



It is important to make regular checks that a person is eating properly and that food is not left to rot in the fridge or cupboards.



Consider labelling kitchen cupboards with pictures or text showing what is in them.



Provide a clear, easy to use kitchen timer as a means of helping the person to remember that something is cooking.



Try to ensure that the cooker is clear and nothing is left on top of the hob (such as a tea towel, for example). Keep the hob, oven and grill clean so there is less likelihood of a build-up of cooking grease which may start to smoke or even catch fire.

Electrical Safety



Check list for the home:



Consider labelling plug switches with instructions such as ‘Do not switch off’ or ‘Switch off at night’.



Label plugs with the name or diagram of the equipment it is connected to: such as “TV”, “washing machine” and “Toaster”.



Remove electric blankets from beds if the person is suffering with incontinence. All electric blankets should be professionally tested every year to ensure there is no damage.



Check plugs throughout the home to ensure a good fit in the socket. Where possible, do not use the old multi-plug adaptors as these have a tendency to pull out of the socket. Consider replacing them with a standard, short cable 4-plug extension lead.



DO NOT overload sockets. No plug socket should contain more than a total of 13 Amps-worth of appliances.

The general rule of thumb for safe loading is as follows:-

- 3 Amp fuses for appliances up to 700 watts
(For example: clock, lamp, radio)
- 5 Amp fuses for appliances up to 1000 watts
(For example: laptop, computer, DVD player, blender, printer)
- 13 Amp fuses for appliances of 1000 watts and over
(For example: washing machine, dishwasher, kettle, toaster, microwave, fridge/freezer, hairdryer, electric heater)



If you are using an extension lead, it is simply an extension of the one plug socket, and as such should not contain more than a total of 13 Amps worth of appliances.



Ensure that the wiring is checked periodically by a qualified electrician.

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- Regularly check for warm or hot plugs or sockets, scorch marks, fuses that often blow or flickering lights.**
- Check for frayed or damaged cables.** If you find any of these, have them replaced by a qualified electrician.
- DO NOT run appliance cables under carpets, mats or rugs.**
- Try to avoid using 'reel' extension leads indoors.** If you do, then the full length of cable **MUST** be fully unwound and left loosely coiled with plenty of air around it. If you don't do this the cable could overheat and catch fire.
- Keep electrical appliances away from water.** For example, don't place a vase of flowers on top of a TV set.
- Avoid trailing cables in the kitchen.** For example, the kettle cable hanging over the side of the counter.
- Switch off as many electrical appliances as possible at night.** Avoid charging phones, ipads etc. overnight or for long periods. This can result in battery damage and overheating.
- Do not charge mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers etc overnight or leave them charging once they have reached 100%** because this can damage the batteries and be a potential fire hazard. Unplug charging cables after use and replace any damaged cables immediately. If bare wires are showing through the cable casing then it is no longer safe to use.
- Try to avoid using 'reel' extension leads indoors.** If you do, then the full length of cable **MUST** be fully unwound and left loose with plenty of air around it. If you don't do this the cable could overheat and catch fire.

Fires/Heating Safety



Check list for the home:



If you use an open fire ensure that the chimney is swept regularly and certified safe at least once a year. It is advisable to have a carbon monoxide alarm.



Ensure that an adequate 'spark guard' is always left in front of an open fire, even when it would seem the fire has died out. Do not put clothes in front of an open fire to dry.



Ensure that all wood, coal and other fuels are stored at a safe distance from the fire.



If a gas fire is in use, ensure that it is serviced by a Gas Safe engineer at least once a year.

For any home that has any gas appliances, ensure there are an appropriate number of Carbon Monoxide alarms placed around the home. You can also purchase Gas alarms, which will detect 'non-burning' gas – for example, if the gas hob has been switched on but not ignited.



Ensure that chimneys, flues and vents are not blocked and have them checked regularly.



Try to avoid having 'exposed element' heaters in the home. Consider buying oil filled radiators with thermostatic/timer controls.



Electric heaters should be placed well away from anything flammable, such as furniture, curtains and seating. These heaters should not be left unattended or left on overnight.



As dementia advances, it can become difficult for a person to gauge how warm or cold they are. Try, if possible, to set the hot water controls to a safe level (maximum 60°C). Try to set the heating to come on at regular times during the day to ensure a comfortable and steady temperature.

Candle Safety



Check list for the home:



Remove candles, oil burners etc. and replace with simple 'push button' torches, battery operated candles or tea lights.

Child Safety



Check list for the home:



Try to ensure that children are always supervised by another adult. A person with Dementia is less likely to be able to remember and think about all the possible hazards around the house.



Smoking Safety



Check list for the home:



Try to discourage smoking as much as possible. However, for those who do smoke, ensure there are plenty of ashtrays around.



The risk for people who use incontinence pads is greater as these pads can be highly flammable. Consider obtaining a small fire resistant blanket to place over the lap when smoking. Fire resistant bedding is also available. Certain skin creams can be highly flammable too.



Smoking in bed carries the highest risk – it is very easy to fall asleep and drop the cigarette. Consider placing a fire resistant blanket on top of the bed or use fire retardant bedding.



Fire and Gas Detection



Check list for the home:



Ensure that there are adequate smoke alarms throughout the home. There are specialist alarms available for those with a hearing impairment, which include a bright flashing strobe light by the bedside and a vibrating pad under the pillow to alert people to danger at night when they do not have their hearing aids in. This type of alarm system may however be too confusing for someone with advanced dementia.



A person with dementia may not be aware of what the sound of an alarm means or they may be frightened by the noise it makes and become confused. Consider installing a Care Link system. This is a smoke alarm provided by Lifeline (Welbeing) or similar organisation, which is linked through to the organisation control. It means that when the alarm sounds due to fire or smoke, the signal goes straight through to the care link providers, who will then alert the emergency services. Other types of alarms can also be run through this system, such as Carbon Monoxide and Gas detectors.



Ensure that there are adequate Carbon Monoxide and Gas Detection alarms throughout the home if there are gas appliances, open fires or a wood burning stove.

Bedtime Routine (either by person themselves, family member or Carer)



Check list for the home:



Shut doors at night – particularly kitchen and sitting room doors and any other rooms which contain electrical equipment.



Check that the fire guard is in place (if an open fire is still in use.)



Switch off as much electrical equipment as possible before going to bed.



Ensure that windows and doors are secured, ensuring that keys are readily available in case of an emergency. Consider putting hooks up in appropriate places with clearly marked labels saying “PLACE FRONT DOOR KEY HERE AT NIGHT” or “LEAVE WINDOW KEYS HERE”. It is essential that if windows are kept locked, then there must be a key in all rooms and that all people either living in or visiting the home know where the keys are.



Ensure that all smoking materials are fully extinguished.



Empty all ashtrays into an appropriate fire-proof bin outside the building before going to bed.



Don't put the washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher on before going to bed.

Escape Plan

A circular icon with a grey background and a dark blue rectangle in the center containing the word "EXIT" in white capital letters.

It may be very difficult to explain an escape plan to a person with dementia because of their memory problems. It may be helpful to walk and talk through an escape plan. There are usually two or three main options for escape in the event of a fire:

Plan A

Getting out via a main exit.

- If the way is clear of smoke and fire, get out of the house, shut the door behind you and get to a neighbour's house in order to raise the alarm by calling 999.

Plan B

Making yourself safe in a room.

- If it is not possible to get out of the house, either because of poor mobility or because smoke or fire is preventing it, then the next best thing is to make yourself safe in a room.
- Shut the door and place something at the bottom of the door such as a dressing gown or a pillow to stop as much smoke as possible from entering the room.
- If there is a telephone or mobile in the room, there is a greater chance of being able to call for help. Dial 999 and ask for the Fire Service. Try to give as much information about where in the house you are so that the Fire Crew can find you quickly.
- Press your Care link or Lifeline/Welbeing button if applicable.
- Open the windows and get lots of fresh air.
- Shout to attract attention from neighbours and passers by.
- If smoke is starting to enter the room then try to get down on the floor. The air will be clearer down on the floor, as smoke rises to the highest point and works its way down.

Plan C

Last resort – getting out of a window.

- If you cannot get out of a main exit and fire and smoke are starting to break through into the room you are in, as a last resort you may have to consider getting out of a window. Never attempt to exit out of any window higher than first floor level.
- Throw bedding or clothing etc. out of the window first so that you have something soft to land on.
- DO NOT jump out of the window, but try to climb out so that you are hanging from the window ledge.
- Let yourself drop onto the bedding or clothing. If possible, try to bend your knees and roll when you land to avoid serious injury.
- Think about if there is a safer exit, such as a room with a flat roof under the window. This would then break the descent.



General Safety Tips in the event of a Fire

DO NOT investigate. For example, if the smoke alarm is sounding, do not go around the house to see where the fire is. Do not open closed doors because the fire may be the other side.

DO NOT try to tackle a fire, no matter how small it may seem at the time. A fire can get out of control very easily, but more importantly, toxic smoke builds up very quickly.

Get as close to the floor as possible if there is a lot of smoke in the room/house. The air will be clearer down on the floor, as smoke rises to the highest point and works its way down.

GET OUT, STAY OUT and CALL 999.



General Safety



Check list for the home:

Put notices inside the front door with reminders such as “Take keys” and “Lock door”.

Make sure essential items are easy to find – such as toilet rolls, washing equipment etc.

Be careful with medication or other potentially hazardous items. A person with dementia may not be able to tell the difference between a bottle of cleaning liquid and a bottle of medicine. Keep all medication in a separate container, well away from other potentially hazardous household items.

Remove any unnecessary electrical items that are no longer needed.

If the person you care for has other carers visiting on a regular basis, it is important that you have an open channel of communication with them, so that information can be shared.

Remove locks from toilet and bathroom doors so that the person cannot become trapped inside.

Try to ensure that the bathroom is made as safe and accessible as possible. Consider additional hand rails, raised toilet seat, bath/shower seat, non-slip flooring and non-slip bath surface.

To help avoid confusion about visitors to the home, keep a diary of all planned visits near to where the person usually sits.

Consider making up a noticeboard containing a list in bold lettering containing names and contact numbers of all relevant people.

Consider getting a key safe box installed outside the home so that authorised people can gain access in an emergency.

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- Put a safety chain inside the front door** to encourage the person not to open the door to strangers or anyone they are not expecting.
- Consider getting taps adapted** so that they automatically switch off after a certain time or they limit the amount of water released.
- Try to introduce assistive technology devices in the early stages of dementia** as it may become harder for the sufferer to learn new things as the dementia advances.
- Consider getting a Personal ID bracelet** for the person you care for, containing all of their relevant emergency contact details.
- There is a vast range of Movement Sensor equipment** available that can be put in place – such as sensor pads – so that a monitoring office can be aware if a person has perhaps fallen out of bed or left the house unexpectedly.



Caring for Yourself

In order to be an effective help or carer for someone living with Dementia, it is essential that you also take good care of yourself.



Check list for the home:

Try to have regular breaks.

Try not to neglect your physical health.

Try to build up your own support network of family, friends and professional organisations that can support you by listening and sharing some of the responsibilities.

The Herbert Protocol:

People living with Dementia sometimes go out and find it difficult to find their way back home.

The Herbert Protocol is a national scheme being introduced by the police in partnership with other agencies which encourages carers to compile useful information which could be used in the event of a vulnerable person going missing.

<https://sussex.police.uk/advice/protect-yourself-and-others/missing-persons/herbert-protocol/>

The form should be completed online or by hand with an attached photograph and retained by the family member or carer. It should be handed to a police officer, if a person is reported missing.

Contacts

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service 0303 999 1000

Age UK 0800 169 8787

National Dementia Helpline 0300 222 1122

Care for Carers East Sussex 01323 738390

Contenance Advisory Services

Eastbourne, Hailsham and Seaford & Weald 01323 446990

Hastings & Rother 01424 735688

Brighton & Hove 01273 265912

Life Line

Wealden & Eastbourne 01323 644422

Brighton & Hove Care Link 01273 692079

Social Care Direct

Adult Social Care Services 0345 608 0191

Brighton & Hove Access Point 01273 295555

STEPS to stay independent

Eastbourne, Lewes or Wealden 01323 436414

Hastings or Rother 0300 123 2422

Alzheimers Society www.alzheimers.org.uk



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Become A Dementia Friend:

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is signed up to the Dementia Friends programme coordinated by the Alheimers Society.

This initiative aims to change people's perceptions of Dementia; changing the way we think, talk and act around people living with Dementia and by giving people an understanding of the condition.

Dementia Awareness sessions are run by volunteer Dementia Friends Champions, who are trained and supported by Alzheimer's Society. Each information session lasts around one hour. After attending the voluntary session people will be offered the opportunity to become a Dementia Friend themselves.

If you are supporting someone who is living with Dementia and would like more information on the condition or are interested in attending a Dementia Friends Awareness session you can get information from Alzheimer's Society website at www.alheimers.org.uk or contact their helpline on 0300 222 1122.

Free Fire Safety Advice

To arrange a Home Safety Visit contact:

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

Telephone: 0800 177 7069

Minicom: (01323) 462002

Fax: (01323) 462044

E-mail: homefire.safetyvisits@esfrs.org

This booklet is also available in large print.

To request a copy in the large print size, please contact:

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

Telephone: 0303 999 1000