

# **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 all unsafe scatter rugs/mats
  - Install non-slip under-padding
  - Replace with rugs/mats that have 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 there is adequate lighting: install extra lights fixtures, use night lights.
- Leave lights on prior to nightfall.
- Reduce glare in brightly lit areas by covering windows with sheer coverings.
- Avoid using bare light bulbs; ensure light shades are in use.
- 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.
- Use contrasting colour dot (sticker, bumper dot or tactile marker) to indicate the number/button to release an automatic door, on commonly used appliance settings, and for hot water taps.
- Use contrasting colour adhesive strips to mark pathways to important areas – bathroom, kitchen, living room, laundry.

### BATHROOM:

- Reduce clutter on bathroom floor, countertop, in drawers and cabinets.
- Use high-contrast non-slip bath mat or strips.
- Safely install high-contrast grab bars in the shower or bathtub; use contrasting tactile strip on existing grab bars to differentiate from the tub or towel bar.
- Pick up bathmat when not in use and store appropriately to prevent falls.
- If there is noted difficulty accurately locating the toilet, consider obtaining a toilet seat in a contrasting bright colour. Also consider obtaining a raised toilet seat with arms and taping the arms with a bright colour in contrast against the toilet seat.
- Label important areas in the bathroom: toilet, sink, bathroom door (yellow paper with black writing).
- Tape handles (sink and toilet) with bright colour contrasting tape to distinguish handles from the rest of the sink or the toilet.
- Use a contrasting coloured tape or dot to indicate the hot water tap.
- Keep soap in a bright container (i.e., red) with contrasting colour soap (i.e, white).
- Use signs as reminders 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.

### 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.
- It may be easier for some to use a duvet rather than numerous sheets and blankets.
- 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.
- Ensure appropriate choice of footwear: flat, non-slip sole, enclosed toe and heel, Velcro fasteners.

### KITCHEN:

- Indicate frequently used settings on appliances with a contrasting colour bumper dot, tactile marker, bright tape or nail polish (e.g. 350 degrees on the stove, normal cycle for the dishwasher, and the 1-minute button on the microwave).
- 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.
- Supervise the person while using the stove, and if necessary, disconnect the stove and other appliances when they are home alone.
- Consider using appliances with automatic shut-off; i.e., kettle.
- Place cleaning supplies away from food supplies.
- Dispose of hazardous substances that are no longer needed and store other potentially hazardous substances in a secure place (i.e. locked cupboard).
- Try to ensure that everything is put away in its routine place.
- Plan an appropriate organizational structure to the kitchen. Consider having one designated area of counter space for preferred and usual foods; an area that is both accessible and visible. Try 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 frequently used items and participating in meal preparation.
- Keep counters clear and minimize clutter.
- 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.

### 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 if necessary during meal times.

### 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 that go further than the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Remove or replace unsafe flooring with a plain, non-slip surface.
- Contrasting colour strips (paint or tape) on the edge of each individual step, as well as a tactile cue at the top and the bottom of the stairs (both inside and outside).

### *Progression:*

- Install a lockable door or safety gate to prevent the use of stairs.
- Arrange living area that can be maintained on one level.

### 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; medication organizers and alarms; list of current medications; medication schedule.

### SCHEDULING & TELEPHONE USE:

- Use a phone with large print and high contrast numbers, as well as one-touch programmable numbers.
- Program emergency and frequently used numbers into the phone and add tactile and/or high contrast markers to increase ease of identification.
- Establish a dedicated communication area with needed items including the phone, notepad, pen, whiteboard with large writing area and a black marker.
- Place the telephone on a bright contrasting colour mat.
- Use contrasting coloured tape to outline phone cradle.
- If possible and necessary, utilize a voice activation service for phone dialling.
- Use talking watches or clocks to indicate the time and appointments.

### References

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