



Home Modifications for Individuals with Dementia Course Summary

The course starts with a review of common symptoms associated with dementia: poor judgment; forgetfulness/getting lost/losing things; difficulty initiating activities; perseveration/repetitive behaviors/some wandering; difficulty sequencing activities; vision changes (depth perception and contrast sensitivity perception); walking/gait problems; and agitation — as a response mechanism. With these symptoms in mind, the next step is to develop a set of design goals that should guide decisions about how the home environment ought to be structured. Five design goals are briefly described below.

Regulating stimulation. This is incredibly important, because people with dementia can't cope with as much going on around them at once as other people can, and when they get upset, they are likely to express it as agitation. By stimulation, we mean unnecessary noises, glare (from sunlight or exposed light bulbs), and busy visual environments—for instance if there is lots of clutter around.

Maximize orientation. There are two different sides to orientation; one is wayfinding, or helping people find their way. People with dementia can get lost in their own home, unable to find the bathroom or bedroom. The other aspect of orientation relates to helping people stay orientated to what's going on or to what they should do. A common example is that people with dementia may lose sense of time, and either not remember to eat, or not remember that they just ate, and want another meal.

Safety. Providing a safe environment for people with dementia is tantamount to home modification strategy. The challenge with safety is to not place unnecessary restrictions on the person with dementia, but to match the level of safety intervention with their abilities and disabilities.

Control. As the disease progresses, caregivers need increasing ability to monitor and sometimes control where the person is and what they are doing, until the end stage, when the person is almost totally dependant. But people with dementia also have the desire—and the right—to make decisions as well. The best solution is to often limit the number or range of choices available to the person with dementia to a few choices which are all acceptable.

Maintaining independence. People with dementia are constantly faced with what they can't do anymore because of the disease. To help them maintain self-esteem and a high quality of life, it's important to find ways to enable them to continue to do their personal care and daily chores and activities as independently as possible.

The relationship between activity-related problems experienced by people with dementia, underlying symptoms, design goals and home modifications, is illustrated by the chart the following page. The chart, which addresses the problem of getting in and out of the house, represents 1 page of a 17 page table that presents specific ideas for home modifications to support individuals with dementia.

For more complete information, we invite you to take the online course, available at www.IDEASConsultingInc.com and click on the Home Modifications logo on the right.

Problems with Routine Household Activities

ACTIVITY: MOBILITY/TRANSFER		HOME MODIFICATION STRATEGIES BY LEVEL OF AUTONOMY/SUPERVISION		
Problem/ Underlying Symptoms	Specific Objective/ Design Goals	High Autonomy		High Supervision
<p>Getting in and out of the home due to forgetfulness, changes in visual perception (i.e., depth perception and contrast sensitivity) and in gait and balance</p>	<p>Increase lighting & visual contrast to ensure safety (in ambulation) and maintain independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place lighting fixtures to maximize illumination and prevent dark areas • Use fluorescent or halogen lighting • Add lamps in rooms • Use light colored lamp shades • Use rocker or push switches on lamps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use timers or motion sensors to automatically turn lights & lamps on/off • Use fluorescent/low watt bulbs with motion sensor lights at night to give eyes time to adjust • Use compact fluorescent bulbs to prevent burns/decrease glare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to lighting (switch/lamp) within reach of doorway/exit path • Increase lighting luminance to enable caregiver to provide assistance with mobility
	<p>Add assistive features or eliminate level changes to ensure safety and maintain independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep stairs in good repair & free of debris • Increase contrast on stair edges with paint or reflective tape • Install rails on both sides that extend beyond top and bottom step/ ramp • Use alternate entry with fewer or no steps • Plan for possibility of individual not being able to use steps such as building deck or porch at main level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create level entrance • Install a ramp or lift • Re-grade to create a sloping walk • Install a portable ramp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use porch or deck for access to outdoors • Install gate on porch steps
	<p>Add assistive features or remove obstacles at doors to ensure safety and maintain independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove clutter from path (e.g., hoses, cords, rugs, flower pots, furniture) • Trim shrubs to keep path clear of foliage • Provide places to sit and rest (e.g., porch bench) • Use lever handles • Remove screen doors to simplify task • Remove steps and high thresholds to eliminate changes in level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install kick plates on doors • Replace heavy doors with lightweight ones • Use a power assisted door • Use remote control for power door opener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install automatic/power assisted doors • Widen doorways to accommodate mobility aid or caregivers assisting mobility • Use swing away hinges on doors • Rearrange furniture to increase space at doorways for caregiver assist with mobility and accommodate mobility aid
	<p>Use prompts/reminders at doors to maximize orientation and maintain independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep keys in door or attach to string tied to door knob • Reminder note to open/close door • Label entrances • Use redundant cues such as sounds to attract attention, or multiple signs or objects • Place chair next to door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paint/stain door or doorframe to contrast with wall • Lever handles with directions (e.g., “push down to open”) 	