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How Environment Can Affect People with Dementia

Understanding the changes that can affect an elder with dementia is helpful for providing a firm foundation. According to the Alzheimer's Association, the following are five key areas that will be affected as the disease progresses:

- Judgment: for example, forgetting how to use household appliances;
 - Sense of time and place: getting lost on one's own street or being unable to recognize or find areas in the home;
 - Behavior: becoming easily confused, suspicious, or fearful;
 - Physical ability: experiencing difficulty with balance or depending on a walker or wheelchair to get around; and
 - Senses: for example, experiencing changes in vision, hearing, sensitivity to temperature, or depth perception.
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Clearly, these changes underscore the importance of flexibility. Some elders with dementia may experience all these changes at once, while others may never undergo a change in behavior but may experience a drastic decrease in physical ability. Some may experience only moderate changes in these areas, but these changes may occur over a longer period of time. There is no timeline for such transformations, making the challenge of adapting the home all the more difficult.

Designing a Successful Action Plan

The Alzheimer's Association recommends the following five steps to create a dementia-friendly home:

- **Assess the home:** Look at the home with consideration of the patient with dementia. What objects could cause injury? Identify areas of possible danger. Is it easy to get outside or to other dangerous areas such as the kitchen, garage, or basement?
 - **Focus on adapting rather than teaching:** Rather than trying to reteach an elder about safety, identify possible risks and take preventive precautions.
 - **Simplify the activities:** Most accidents, especially in the area of personal care, occur when an elder is rushed. Break up activities into simple step-by-step tasks, allowing the individual plenty of time to complete them. Give extra help with tasks that have become particularly difficult.
 - **Support the individual's needs:** Avoid creating a home that feels too restrictive. The home should encourage independence, social interaction, and meaningful activities.
 - **Be realistic about limitations:** It's impossible to prevent every problem. Rely on common sense while paying close attention to
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objects or activities that could be dangerous.

Keeping a Safe Home

Creating a list is extremely helpful for bringing all the pieces together in the home. The Alzheimer's Association has developed an excellent tool that breaks it down room by room:

- In the kitchen: Lock up cleaning supplies. Turn off electricity to the garbage disposal. Hide knives and other utensils. Store small appliances such as the toaster and the blender. Unplug larger appliances such as the microwave. Remove knobs from the stove; connect the stove to a hidden gas valve or electric switch. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby. Clean out the refrigerator regularly.
 - In the bathroom: Set the water temperature at 120°F or lower. Install grab bars. Add textured stickers to slippery surfaces. Supervise the use of hair dryers, curling irons, and electric and hand razors. Remove locks from the bathroom door. Remove dangerous items from medicine chests.
 - In the bedroom: Avoid using electric blankets. Monitor the use of heating pads. Install night lights between the bedroom and bathroom.
 - In the garage: Lock up hand and power tools such as drills, axes, saws, and picks. Limit access to large equipment such as a lawn mower, a weed trimmer, and a snow blower. Lock up poisonous chemicals such as paints and fertilizers.
 - Throughout the home: Disguise outdoor locks or install dead bolts. Remove or tape down throw rugs and carpeting. Apply colored stickers to large windows and sliding glass doors. Remove poisonous plants. Create an even level of lighting near doorways, stairways, and between rooms. Remove objects that block walking paths. Remove and disable guns or other weapons.
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- Outdoors: Disconnect gas hookups from grills. Lock fence gates. Supervise elders, especially in areas that are not enclosed. Put away car keys.

Focus on Caregivers

If caregivers are unaware of their own needs or push those needs aside, both the caregiver and the elder will be at risk. Caregiver burnout is an unseen but all-too-common hazard; it won't matter how many nonskid rugs are placed or how many door alarms are installed if caregivers are unable to meet elders' needs.

References: Michelle Seitzer is the former public policy coordinator for the Pennsylvania chapters of the Alzheimer's Association and a blogger at SeniorsForLiving.com.

Pinecone Crafts

Making a pinecone craft is easy and versatile. All you need is a little imagination and a pinecone or two. Then look at its shape and let the creativity begin!

You're going to need a few supplies. You can add whatever you might have at home instead. One thing to keep in mind is how you're going to make it stand up.

Supplies

A pine cone, any shape or size

Small ball of clay, playdough, etc. to make a stand

Jiggle eyes from the craft store (you could use beads or colored paper

too)

Colored paper to make a beak and two feet

A couple feathers for the head and tail

Craft glue or a glue gun

Scissors

Glue on the eyes and let dry for a minute. Cut double triangles from paper and glued it on for a beak. Stand the bird in its clay ball. You could use half of a Styrofoam ball or a piece of Styrofoam to stick/glue the pinecone into to stand.

Glue on the ends of the feathers and inserted them into the pinecone, head and tail. Cut out a shape for the feet (roughly in the shape of a sort of heart, but triangles would work) and then stood the whole bird on top of the feet. Because it was in a stand made of a clay ball, the clay would either have to be the kind to dry thoroughly and then you could glue it to the feet. Or do like I did and just stand it on the feet without actually attaching them.

These would be cute to use to display a place setting name card at a table, or to include in a centerpiece. Pine cones are a popular item from nature to use for a fall craft.

Other Pinecone Ideas

Crazy Wacky Animals

With the same idea as above, you can add glitter, sequins and buttons to create your own animal. Let the individuals get creative and have

fun with this craft project.

Pinecone Bird Feeder

Spread peanut butter on the pinecone and roll it in bird seed. Tie yarn or twine around the pinecone keeping the string long enough. Tie it outside for a bird feeder.

Reference: Elder one stop

<http://www.elder-one-stop.com/>



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