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A Safe, Well-lit Space: Home Repairs and Upgrades for a Loved One with Alzheimer's

A home should do more than reflect your tastes and personal decor aesthetic. It should also be a fully functional environment that meets the needs of everyone who lives there. That holds true for any family member who's struggling with Alzheimer's, a neurodegenerative disease that gradually undermines memory and basic cognitive functioning.

People with Alzheimer's can easily become disoriented and confused, and may fail to recognize or remember how to use even the most familiar home features, which poses an ongoing threat of injury. You may need to modify your home so that potential dangers are removed and getting around is as easy as possible. The following guide, courtesy of [Heartwood Place Memory Care Community](#), offers insight on the changes that can keep your loved one safe.

A well-lit space

A living space that's dimly lit increases the likelihood that an Alzheimer's patient will overlook an object on the floor or a small piece of furniture and suffer a potentially dangerous fall. Poor lighting can also add to the confusion and make it more difficult to recognize rooms and physical

features that help an Alzheimer's sufferer navigate their way safely around the house. In advanced cases, they may even experience frightening hallucinations in a room with lots of shadows or become confused as to the time of day.

If parts of your home don't get much natural light, consider adding [interior lighting](#) that's easy to turn on and off with a simple and easy-to-reach switch. Some forms of lighting can be set to match the light outside so that it dims slightly as the day passes into evening.

Use color contrast

Rooms (particularly bathrooms) that are predominantly one shade can make it hard for an individual with dementia to differentiate between objects. Try using [multi-colored paint](#) or different colored tiles to provide enough contrast to help a relative safely use the bathroom, navigate their bedroom, and move around the house. For example, a white toilet set against a wall painted with a rich, dark red shade can make object identification much easier. Do the same with cabinets and storage space. All of this can be accomplished with a few simple tools, such as a [tape measure](#), drill, and hammer.

Declutter

There's enough reward in decluttering the home — it creates a [stress-free space](#), an essential element to a happy home. Remember, the less "stuff" left scattered around on the floor and on tables, the more easily your loved one will be able to move around and find objects they need. It's frustrating for anyone to search through [clutter](#) for a piece of paper, a hairbrush or another personal item among a pile of disorganized household objects. For Alzheimer's patients, it can be frightening and present a threat to their self-confidence and well-being.

There's also a danger that a confused relative may place important objects in obscure, out-of-the-way places in an effort to help you clean up, meaning your wallet or purse could wind up in the dishwasher. It's much safer for you and your relative to keep the house picked up and organized so they become accustomed to where everything goes.

Safeguard and simplify frequently-used spaces

Consider [labeling](#) frequently-used items as a relative's condition worsens. Many people will label the toothbrush, toilet, dresser, clothes hamper and other objects to make everyday living as easy as possible for a relative.

Of course, comfort and safety go hand-in-hand. Place objects that could harm a confused loved one out of reach, or keep them locked away. That goes for knives and other sharp objects, as well as cleaning fluids and prescription medications. Keep small appliances, such as the toaster, unplugged and put away when not in use.

To [avoid potential falls](#), make sure floors are free of clutter or tripping hazards, and consider adding non-slip flooring or mats. Install grab bars in the bathrooms, and add a rubber mat or shower chair in the bathtub.

Secure your home

People suffering from Alzheimer's have a tendency to wander, sometimes in the middle of the night. It's a good idea to install a home [security](#) system so you'll be alerted right away if your family member tries to leave the home. Don't forget about the yard, either. Building a fence isn't a DIY job, but adding a structure with [security latches](#) will ensure your loved one doesn't wander into the street from the yard. Use an online directory to find a local fence company that has garnered great customer reviews, and be sure to get an on-site estimate before moving forward.

Know your financial options

Know your financial options if you need help paying for home modifications. You might be selling your loved one's home and helping them move in with you, and the house sale is an obvious source of funds. Another is to refinance your own home, and there are outside-the-box solutions, too.

People often have life insurance policies they no longer need, which can provide a source of funds. Selling a life insurance policy, or [changing policies](#), can provide needed money for medical expenses or to help with the requirements of daily living. Just be sure you do your research, because there may be tax consequences or upfront fees.

Providing a safe and happy home environment for a loved one with Alzheimer's is an ongoing battle. Taking care of safety basics is essential, because unpredictable behavior is not uncommon in Alzheimer's patients. Use common sense and make modifications as needed to keep pace with your relative's condition.