



Independent Living Centre NSW

Helpful Handbook for Memory Loss



Products

Equipment

Information

Advice

Endless Possibilities for All

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

When our memory is working well, we don't realise how much we use it for everything we do. We use it to recall things, organise ourselves and keep track of events. Only when we have memory problems do we realise how much we use it – without thinking!

If you have early stage dementia or concerns about your memory, this is the time to think about the future. With careful planning and by changing habits now, you can look after yourself, and carry on your regular activities well into the future.

Using this handbook

There are many publications that tell you about the effects of memory loss and dementia. This handbook is intended as a handy reference about products, devices, tips, and hints. For more details on products and prices, contact your local Independent Living Centre by phone, email, or fax. To find your nearest Centre, go to the [Contacts](#) page, or phone 1300 452 679.

In the text you will see products and strategies highlighted in **red**. These are listed in the Product Listing for easy reference. Items marked in **blue** are links to other sections of this handbook or a product website.

Read the sections you are most interested in first. Come back to the handbook when you are ready for more information.

[Independent Living Centres](#) provide free information and advice about products and services to help with everyday living. These Centres do not sell products but can tell you where to get them and an estimated cost. This is a community service funded by state governments. [Contacts](#) are located at the end of this publication.

Preparing for the Future

Everyone is different

Dementia affects different people in different ways. Some people can do a difficult crossword, but not cook a meal. Others can keep household accounts, but not write a letter. Everyone misplaces items, forgets appointments, and has difficulty remembering names. These incidents, however, become more frequent as time passes.

Establish habits

Establishing habits and routines will help guide you through memory lapses. This means doing things the same way, in the same order, and in the same place. This will in turn, help you to maintain your social life and enjoyment of hobbies.

If you are not an organised person it might be difficult to establish strict routines, but if you can, it will be worth the effort.

Get to know the local shops and community services. Although you may go to several shopping centres now, choose one that is easy to get to and find your way around, and use it all the time.

If you don't think you can learn new habits, stick to old ways of doing things. Main things to do now:

- Get to know your surroundings and local community very well,
- Learn how to make full use of the helpful and automatic features of appliances,
- Sort through belongings and paperwork, and store them logically,
- Discard things you don't need to reduce clutter and confusion,
- Create set places for keeping items like keys, money, and tablets,
- Buy any new appliances and gadgets now, and learn how they work.

Home modifications

If you are starting to have any difficulties showering, preparing meals, or moving around, you might need some modifications to your home.

It is best to have modifications done now. If you leave it until later, you might not remember where things are or how they work. Changing cupboards, moving furniture around, installing new appliances, and even changing the type of taps might cause confusion if done later on.

Creating Accessible Environments

Having an accessible environment can be highly influential in enabling someone to live more safely. Making an environment more simple and intuitive can help to support successful engagement in activities, manage anxiety, and compensate for memory loss. It is important to be cautious when making changes to the environment, as change can be unfamiliar or unsettling. The following principles should be used when designing or re-designing the person's environment.

The environment should remain as home-like as possible, so making changes shouldn't compromise comfort and familiarity where possible. Put photos of family members, and treasured items on display to help trigger memories and make it feel familiar. Having familiar items or decorations on view, can help calm and reassure someone.

Make the environment simple, and use **natural cues**. Make sure items that are most commonly used are easily accessible, in predictable places, and in person's line of sight and reach. For example, put all the items required for brushing teeth next to each other on the sink, or place items required for making a cup of tea next to each other. This will support everyday activities, as they will not seem so daunting if items can easily be located. Furthermore, ensure mobility between and around rooms is easy and free of barriers. Declutter the environment to ensure ease of mobility around the room.

To assist orientation, make certain items in a room stand out to help an individual to know where they are in the house. For example, a contrasting toilet seat will stand out in the bathroom, or contrasting bed linen in the bedroom. Signage can also be used to help the person know which room they are in, but this should be kept to a minimum.

Making changes to colours and lighting can not only create mood, but can increase safety around the home. Increasing lighting and using **contrasting colours** can be considered when designing a safe environment. Lighting should be bright but pleasant, and using natural lighting increases contrast between colours. You may be able to control light and shadow with the use of dimmer switches, lamps, and considering the placement of the light source. To create contrast, pair lighter colours with darker colours. It may also help to remove furnishings and floor coverings with confusing patterns or prints that may be misinterpreted.

The following section outlines possible ways of making particular areas of the house more safe and user friendly:

Making entrances and hallways safer and more accessible:

- Use bright lighting and install **sensor lighting** for outside areas.
- Some internal doors could be replaced with **smart doors**, which can open both ways if there is not enough circulation space.
- Replace or mark glass doors.
- Secure or remove loose mats or any floor coverings that could present a tripping hazard.
- Add rails if required, to staircases, verandas, or porches.



Living areas:

- Colour contrast furniture with floor coverings.
- Use familiar items, such as photos of family and favourite ornaments, in the living area to trigger memories and reinforce identity. Keep changes in line with an individual's preferences.
- Remove hazardous furniture, such as glass coffee tables, rocking chairs, and footstools.

Dining room:

- Contrast table and chair colours with floor and walls.
- Use chairs with armrests to assist with sitting and standing safely.
- Use contrasting placemats, plates, and cutlery to help distinguish items. Plain table clothes are preferable to patterned tablecloths.



Kitchen:

- Common items should be stored in the line of sight and within reach in the fridge, cupboards, and draws.
- Place food in clear plastic containers to help the person locate items.
- Group similar items together (e.g.: tea and sugar) and labelling containers and tins may also assist.

Bathroom and toilet:

- Where possible create contrast between doors, floors, walls, sinks, benches, taps, and the toilet.
- Put in non-slip surfaces to prevent falls.
- If renovating, create a combined toilet and hob free, walk in shower to enhance circulation space and provide room for a carer.
- Remove shower screens and replace with a shower curtain of a contrasting colour to the floor and walls.
- Install call duress alarms if the person is at a high risk for falls. This may need to be labelled clearly.
- **Open shelving** may be useful to provide cues to activities, e.g.: brushing teeth.



The bedroom:

- Position the bed so that it is visible on entry and serves as an identifying landmark. Place the bed against the wall as this may assist with bed mobility.
- Contrast bed with floor and walls using contrasting bedding.
- Doors can be removed to create open shelving for easier visual and physical access.
- Simplify the wardrobe so only relevant clothes/ commonly used items are in the most visually accessible places.
- Have optimal levels of lighting with plenty of natural light during the day for dressing, but block out light at night time to encourage good sleep.



Outdoors:

- Secure outdoor spaces (e.g.: fencing, doors, and gates).
- Make paths of travel continuous where possible and fix uneven or slippery surfaces.
- Remove or lock away hazardous items, such as power tools.

Around the House

Keep things simple

The main thing to remember is to keep things simple. By reducing your options, the fewer decisions you'll have to make, which means less chance of getting confused. **Create routines, group related items** together and **automate** what you can. It will reduce the likelihood of misplacing items and forgetting things. It also takes the worry out of wondering if you have remembered to do things.

Household appliances

The fewer gadgets you have, the less likely you are to get confused about which one to use and how to use it. So, give away, store, or discard appliances you rarely or never use.

Reducing utensils, gadgets and appliances also reduces clutter. Less clutter means that your eyes can focus on the task at hand, and you are less likely to get distracted.

If possible, replace appliances that have complicated dials with ones that have a simple way of operation. Dials and knobs with few choices will be easier to manage, e.g: ON/OFF and HIGH/LOW knobs. Dials and knobs that turn are usually easier to recognise and understand than pressure sensitive pads.

Also look for appliances that have safety features. Replace old heaters and bar radiators with heaters that have cut-off switches. For more on safety, see the section on [Safety and Security](#).

The Australian Consumers Association produces a magazine called Choice, which often has a section on easy-to-use appliances. You can obtain copies of Choice by phoning, 1800 069 552 or going to their website, www.choice.com.au

Finding things

If you get disorientated easily, you may want to consider placing a related object in sight as it may help remind you of the space ahead, such as a pot plant at the door to the backyard. Otherwise, leave the doors open so that things in the room, such as the bed or lounge, are more easily seen. If there are some spots that are still confusing, you may want to use a **label or sign** where necessary. In the same way, you may find it easier to identify where items are by using systems like open racks or shelving.

It is easier to remember what you are looking for if you can see it. However, if you have too many things in sight, it can be cluttered and confusing. You will need to find the right balance for yourself.

Managing the mail

Create a system for managing the mail that other people can also follow. Once you have a method tell your family what it is, e.g.: “All mail is opened and stored in the basket next to the phone”, or, “Any bills to be paid are put on the fridge and paid on Wednesdays”.

By minimising the amount of mail you receive, you will minimise confusion. Cancel mail, newsletters, and catalogues from companies you no longer deal with by putting “Return to Sender” on the envelope and posting it back. This will help sort the important mail from nuisance mail. A “NO JUNK MAIL” notice on your letterbox could also help.

Managing the mail can be done in conjunction with creating a “message centre”. See the section on [Communicating and Conversing](#) for more information.


Making things automatic

Sensor lights are useful when getting up in the night. They stay on as long as they detect movement. Some can be set to come on when you get out of bed and switch off five or ten minutes later. Sensor lights are also useful outdoors.

Alternatively, **vision glow strips** can be applied around light switches, skirting boards, and step edges. Strips that continue to glow in the dark can help guide you around so you don't have to turn on lights and disturb others in the household at night.

Automatic timer switches are a great help because there is less to remember. Timer clocks that plug into power points can be programmed to turn table lamps on and off at set times. Some plug-in adapters that allow remote control of a power point via an app, may also include timer functions to be set up for customised schedules of appliance use.





These timers can also be used for other appliances such as heaters and fans. However, take care they don't pose a fire hazard. Timer clocks can be bought from regular electrical appliance and hardware stores.

Controlling your environment

Automated systems can take the worry out of wondering if everything is switched on or off, and if you have difficulty applying the settings you would like to apply.

You may wish to consider installing a **home automation system** whilst it is easier to learn new things, as it may assist in the future. Most automated systems also have a manual control or override function.

More advanced home automation systems can be set for regular activities, such as switching off lights at night. It can be pre-set to run a sequence of activities at a touch of a button. The system can be set up for activation in the morning and evening, when leaving the house, and upon returning home. For example, pressing the "Goodnight" button closes the curtains, turns off the heating system and turns off all other house lights, with the bedroom lights timed to go off later as suited for the individual.

If you already use a computer, tablet, or smartphone, it is possible to have an application installed that lets you control things by a voice command using your hardware. When linked you may be able to turn on and off appliances such as the television or air conditioning. There are different types of automation systems available. Your nearest [Independent Living Centre](#) has more information about these systems. You might want to ask a family member to help.

Communicating and Conversing

Remembering to tell people things

To help remember things, you can tell other people, or create a “**message centre**”, a place for all messages, reminders, and other incoming or outgoing communication. It should be in a room you visit regularly and easily visible. The “message centre” can be as simple as a notice board, or a large diary.

The “message centre” is also a good place to put important letters and bills.

A whiteboard or corkboard is handy for putting up reminders of things you have to tell other people, such as, “Tell Kim I have a doctor’s appointment on Monday”. If you are likely to forget your thoughts by the time you get to the whiteboard, carry a small notepad and pencil with you and write thoughts as they come to mind. Post-it Notes®, which have an adhesive strip, are handy for this purpose. You can also make yourself reminders using this method.

A large **desk diary** can be put to many uses. The diary can be part of your message centre set-up. It should be left open so you can easily see messages. Put in appointments and important events and information for yourself, and other people to see. It will also help you recall past events.

Other people can also use the diary to note what help they have given you. Anyone reading the diary will know what has been, or still needs to be done. This can be reassuring if you cannot remember if something has been done.

Remembering telephone numbers

The simplest system is a telephone **contact book** located close to your phone. Have all important contacts marked and easily accessible for use.

If you have not used the speed-dial or auto-dial facility on your phone before, it could be useful to set it up now. You might like to ask someone to help you. You can set the phone to dial the full telephone number by entering just one or two digits. Use it for your most important or frequently dialled numbers, e.g.: 01 for your friend and 02 for your doctor.

Picture dialling telephones have a set of large auto-dial buttons where you can put photos of



people, or write names. This means you do not have to remember numbers, only the person. This multi-purpose phone can also be linked to other alarm systems and a monitoring service. See the section on [Safety and Security](#) for more information about these systems.

Making the most of a mobile phone

Mobile phones have some advantages over a landline phone. For example, when you set up the contacts list with names and numbers, the caller's name will show on the display screen when they are calling you. Enter names into the mobile's phone book that will identify family members, e.g.: Lin - wife, Lee - daughter.

There are limited capacity mobile phones that are individually made up with a set of your own contacts. The numerical pad is replaced with personalised speed dials and some may offer picture labels if provided. An SOS contact can be set up as well as other close contacts.

Smartphones have voice activation for dialling numbers automatically. You might want to ask for help to set up this function. Whilst smartphones can offer many useful functions, they can be less straightforward to use, and the touch screen may be too responsive. There are however, apps available to make the main functions of a smartphone easier.

You do need to keep a mobile phone with or around you for it to be effective, and it requires frequent charging, which will need to be incorporated into your routine.



Finding the phone

If you are likely to leave the phone off the hook, a wall-mounted phone might prevent this from happening. If you see the handset hanging, you will know it is off the hook.

If you are likely to misplace the handset of a cordless phone, it might be worth getting a phone with a cord. That way the base and handset won't get separated and you won't need to worry about recharging.

The newer cordless phones with a digital display are useful for identifying who is calling. If you enter into the memory the names and phone numbers of people you call, when they call you, the display screen will show their name.

Cordless phones run on batteries and need recharging. Develop a system for making sure you recharge the phone each day.

Communicating with others

Communicating by telephone can be difficult if you can't always find the right words. Video options are available if you are familiar with a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Being able to see each other means you can use your face and hands to help with communication. It is also possible to show things to each other.

This can be done on a computer or a tablet device with programs such as **Skype**.



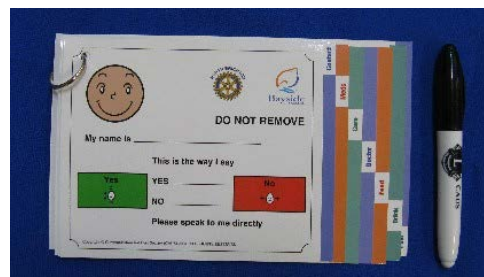
If you are familiar with email, sending messages by email might be a good way of communicating. This is good if you can recall words better in writing, or need more time to think of the right word.

Telling people important medical information

Stress and illness can make communicating more difficult. If you have an accident or feel very unwell while you are out, you will need to communicate health problems or medication advice to other people.

Wayne's hospital kit is a communication aid that allows you to record important medical information about yourself. This can be kept in a handbag and used during medical appointments to prompt you regarding important information, such as allergies or current medication.

In an emergency, a **Medic-Alert** bracelet or talisman on a neck chain will allow other people to access important information when spotted.



As a minimum, it is worth carrying a card with your name and emergency details in your wallet. The **Alzheimer's Australia identification card** is useful for this purpose if you require people to be patient with you while you remember things. If so, carry a card that says something like, "I have a memory problem, give me time to think" or, "I have difficulty finding the right words, please give me more time".



If you are on your own, an **Emergency Call System** can allow you to obtain assistance. There are a variety of options and these are discussed in both mobile phones and security sections of this booklet.

A range of the common products available for emergency identification and monitoring is listed below:

Dementia Identity Cards

Safety Home Bracelet is a bracelet that provides accurate identification, and return of a wandering person to their home. When someone finds the lost person, they call police with the ID number and arrangements are made by the police to return the person home safely.

Emergency ID Bracelets

Personal Alarm Systems with GPS functions enables carers or family to accurately locate the individual with dementia through their phone.

Money Management

Preparing for the future

Whilst you are still able to take part in the planning process, it is a good time to organise the future of your financial and legal affairs.

Planning for financial and legal affairs including, writing a will, granting power of attorney, and discussing medical decisions, can help both a person with dementia and their carers and family. You can find out more from your local solicitor, citizen's advice centre, local community legal service financial adviser, or Alzheimer's Australia. To find your nearest community legal centre, visit the [National Association of Community Legal Centres](#) or phone their national office, on 02 9264 9595. Alzheimer's Australia can be contacted on The National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 for further information, or visit their website: [Alzheimer's Australia](#)

Setting up a system

It is important to start organising your finances now as later on it may be more difficult to remember whether or not bills have been paid. A good system will allow you to stay in charge of your money for longer, and make it easier for families and carers to assist in managing these affairs.

It is a good idea to gather all your important financial documents in one area, and tell someone you trust about it. If you are sharing finances with a partner, you may need to ensure that your bank account is in joint names, so that the other person can continue to operate it. You may want to consider appointing someone to manage your money in the case you are no longer able to manage it. Consider giving this person access to your account with a second card and their own PIN number. This will help in times of illness or difficulty. You can have two people operating your account and signing for major transactions if you prefer.

Make a list of all your accounts. Include all the bank details, name, address, BSB number, and account number. Combine as many accounts as possible into one account to simplify things. List all regular income and payments. A year planner might be useful for this purpose, especially if you have income from investments or anticipate share dividends.

Paying bills

If you do not have a system for organising bills, choose a noticeable place for putting unpaid bills. Develop a system of putting bills in this place when they arrive. The section on [Communicating and Conversing](#) describes how to create a “message centre”. You can use this message centre to organise your bills as well.

Regular bills such as telephone, internet, electricity, gas, and water can be paid using Direct Debit. Information about setting up a Direct Debit is usually on the bill. If you sign up to this process, the cost of the bill will be automatically deducted from your nominated bank account. You don't have to worry about paying these bills, or having the service cut off. You will need to make sure there is always enough money in your account to pay these bills.

Other bills such as rent and insurances can be handled in a similar way. It is a good idea to make an appointment with your bank to organise as many automatic payments as you need.

If you use a credit card, consider reducing the maximum spending limit to only what you need. You are then less likely to create unintended debt. Alternatively, change your credit card to a debit card, also with an appropriate maximum limit. Discuss this with your family and bank. All cards now require a PIN so ensure that this is a number which you will easily remember.

Alternatively, **Pay Pass/Pay Wave** is now available on most credit/debit cards and in most stores, and can be used for any spending less than \$100. This can be used without a PIN, so it is useful for someone who may often forget their PIN.

Internet banking is also useful as it enables you to view your spending and statements at any time, as well as pay bills and transfer money online. Talk to your bank branch about how to set this up and use it effectively.



Wallets and purses

If you use more than one wallet or purse to separate cash for different purposes, you could get confused about which wallet to use. Consider using just one wallet for your cash. A wallet or purse with two note compartments makes looking for cash simpler. Cash can be kept in one compartment and receipts in the other. Using a debit card will reduce the need to have cash in different places.

Remembering Things

Day, date and time

A newspaper delivered daily is an easy and reliable way to remember the day and date. Used in conjunction with a diary, it can remind you of appointments and activities. Develop a system for discarding old newspapers to avoid confusion.

Calendar clocks display the time, date, day of the week, and month. Position the clock in a place that's readily seen, such as on top of the television or in the kitchen. Once you know the day and date, you can check your diary for appointments and tasks. Quality batteries usually last twelve months, so put a reminder note in your diary to change the batteries in twelve months' time. Clocks that show whether it is morning or evening time can help prevent disorientation, especially in the light summer evenings or dark winter mornings.



Cable TV services, such as Foxtel, usually have a channel providing day, date, and time, and a weather channel. Many electrical appliances, such as ovens and microwaves also display the time. Mobile phones will also display the time, date, and day.

A **radio alarm clock** can be set to alarm on the hour to get the time, day, and weather when you wake up. The radio needs to be tuned to a station that reports the day and weather. You may want to make a note of the date and the weather so you can refer to it later.

Make sure to put in your diary when Daylight Savings begins and ends to ensure that you have the correct time.

Seasonal changes

Apart from the date, orientation boards can display the season and weather. This helps with choosing clothes for the weather, as well as general orientation to the time of year. Someone else might need to change the details each day. Home-made orientation boards work just as well and can be made to suit you.

In south eastern parts of Australia, just before the start of daylight saving time, the early mornings can be very bright. This can be confusing if you are not aware of the time. It may cause you to get up too early and possibly disturb other household members from their sleep. Heavy drapes on all windows will help solve the problem.

They need to be opened during the day to keep the routine of recognising day and night.

The news channel on the TV or radio station, mobile phones, and internet pages can also be used to find out the weather forecast.

Remembering events

A simple diary can be used to record appointments, upcoming events, and messages between you and others. There are large print diaries that are clearly set out and more user-friendly. Keep the diary in a prominent place, such as next to the phone. It's also a good idea to attach a pen to the diary. This makes it handy for recording any plans as they are discussed. Another idea that may be useful is a **pictorial calendar**, which comes with a range of magnetic pictures entries that can be placed on the associated calendar. This allows you to see and change what is coming up in the week or month. See the section on [Communicating and Conversing](#) for more information about a "message centre".



Clocks that record messages can remind you of events at set times. Voice recording alarm clocks sound the message and repeat it until it is turned off. You may need some help, so ask a close friend or family member to record the messages. Hearing a familiar voice can be reassuring. These messages can be used for everyday tasks too, such as 'lock the front door'.

Most mobile phones now come with calendars and **reminder alert** systems. You may wish to get some assistance to put in reminders or create a schedule. Reminders can be programmed into the phone with an alarm set to remind you. The device sounds when the set reminder time arrives. The appointment or event is displayed on the screen. Multiple reminders can be set for each event, such as the day before the event, the hour before, and the time of the event, to ensure that you remember it. The phone will need to be charged with a wall charger every few days, so it is



important to set up a system to ensure you remember to charge it. Keeping the charger on your bedside table might help you remember to put it on the charger every evening.

Remembering the past

Sometimes remembering dates of past events can be difficult and frustrating. Photos and film about the past can be very useful. Make a **photo album** of memories with labelled pictures of people and events with dates. This will help you remember recent events and reminisce about the past. **Electronic photo frames** can also be useful to evoke memories about the past, and can be set to stream constantly. Talking photo albums allow someone to record a message for each photograph and can also be good reminiscing aids. Playing music that is familiar can also be useful.



Remembering where you put things

Put keys, pen, wallet, diary, and other important items in the same place every time. This reduces the frustration of forgetting where you last put them. It will allow you to use your energy for the task at hand instead of looking for things.

Designate special places for things you are likely to misplace and find a way of marking the spot. For example, a special hook or dish for keys, a hanging pocket for a diary, and a pot for pens and pencils. You may wish to label the dish, hook, pocket, or pot to act as a reminder. A hook for a handbag or hanging pocket for a wallet could be useful too. A row of coat hooks is another way of keeping related items together.



You can also find things by using a beeping locator or tracking device. The **Wireless Key Finder** has four beeping tags that you can attach to small items, such as keys. When you press the button on the transmitter, a beeping sound will come from the tag. By following the direction of the beeping sound, you can find the misplaced item. The transmitter, however, needs to be kept in the same place all the time for this idea to work. Fixing it to the wall or fridge can prevent it from being misplaced. There are also options that use GPS tracking and a corresponding smartphone app to trace the whereabouts of an item, such as the

StickNFind Finder Stickers. As these often have battery operated parts, they will need to be changed from time to time.

Finding things in cupboards and drawers

Clutter creates confusion and makes it hard to organise thoughts and find things easily. Clean out drawers and cupboards, and discard items you no longer use. This will help you find things more easily because you will be able to see it at a glance.

Drawer dividers can help you sort the contents of draws so you can see what you are trying to find.

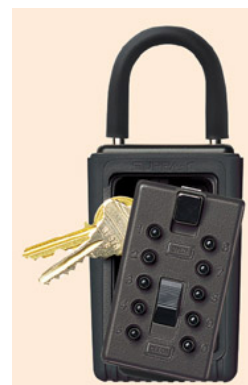
You may wish to label the drawers and cupboard doors with the name of the contents for extra clarity, or keep items you use together in the same spot to make things easier.

Clear containers for food storage will show their contents, which can help you to see where things are. Removing cupboard doors might also help to tell you what is in each cupboard.

Lastly, you may decide to keep related items that you use regularly, out on the bench together so you do not need to go searching for it, such a glass or cup near a jug of water. This will make the task a lot simpler and less frustrating if you are having difficulty finding items.

Remembering to take your keys

A sign on the door is the simplest way of reminding yourself to take your keys with you. However there are even motion activated voice memos that allow you to record a reminder that will sound when it detects movement, such as the **Motion Activated Memo Reminder**. Consider converting your locks to allow a single master key. It means you don't have to search through a bunch of keys to find the right one. It also means you only need to give family members one key to gain access to your house.



If you misplace your keys often, it might be a good idea to install a key safe somewhere on your property so you can safely retrieve a spare set of keys. You can safely store a spare set of keys outside your house in a security box, such as the **GE Keysafe** padlock, or **Supra Electric Key Safe**. Only people who know the code can open it. This means that in an emergency, family and friends who know the code can access the safe box to retrieve the key for your house.

You can eliminate the need for keys by installing a **biometric door lock**. When set up, this will allow you to unlock the door by placing your finger on the scanner pad to register your finger print. Another authorised person can also be set up to gain access into the premises. You can also consider a keypad and PIN entry system if you have a familiar PIN code that you don't tend to forget. You may want to consider whether you feel familiar with these options for use later down the track.



Remembering to turn off taps

Sensor taps can be useful as they don't need turning on or off. They are activated by movement and will automatically switch off when the hand moves away from the sensor. This will prevent the tap being left on accidentally. Not everyone finds sensor taps helpful. Some people get confused if they cannot see a tap handle. In this case, spring-loaded taps might be another option as they provide a timed flow. A reminder sign to put the plug in the bath or sink might also be required if you are likely to forget to put in the plug.

A **Magiplug** is a plug designed to prevent a sink or bath from overflowing. It has a special custom inbuilt mechanism that releases water when a certain pressure is reached to avoid flooding. It is available online for delivery from UK and USA retailers.



Tunstall Flood Detector Sensors can also be fitted on the skirting boards or floors in the bathroom or kitchen, which sound an alarm locally and notify others via compatible Personal Alarm Call System.

Remembering to turn off appliances

A sign such as “switch off after use” next to each appliance is a simple way of remembering to turn off appliances. Signs last longer if they are laminated.

Cut-off switches can be used to prevent an electric or gas stove being left on, by automatically turning off power after a set usage time. For example, the **Vigil Aide Electric and Gas Stove Isolation System** can be used to perform this function.

Another product that can be used is the **Stove Guard Motion Sensor** which turns the stove/oven off one minute after last sensing movement in the kitchen area. Environmental control units can also control when certain switches are active, again allowing certain appliances to be used only at certain times, such as when another individual is present. In the later stages if safety is an issue, or stove or oven **knob cover**, may be used to prevent operation of the stove or oven. It is better to use non-transparent covers for this purpose. Alternatively, the stove/oven can be switched off at the wall socket, or at the main switchboard. Some appliances may also need to be left unplugged.



Installing a **gas leak detector** near the stove is another option. The detector sounds an alarm if gas is detected. Some detectors automatically shut off the gas if a leak is detected. It is also possible to install a remote alarm for those living alone, which would sound at another site, such as a neighbour's house, or connect to a phone modem so it can ring a particular telephone number and notify someone else.



Microwave cooking may be a safer alternative, though there are some rules to remember. If you haven't used a microwave for cooking meals before, this is a good time to learn and practice the techniques.

Appliances that beep or switch off if left on are helpful. Most irons will cut off or beep if left for too long in an upright or horizontal position, thus alerting a person that it is still on. **Power-point timers** can automatically switch appliances off at a pre-set time. The appliance is plugged into the timer and the timer into the power point. Varieties of countdown timers are available and can be set to switch off after a designated amount of time.



Remembering where to get services and help

Compile a list of your local services (e.g.: doctor, hairdresser, accountant, solicitor) and community support services (e.g.: community bus, home care). List their contact details so you know whom to contact. A list of services and numbers could be placed on the fridge, so it is easy to find. If you have service brochures or print outs from the internet, save them all in one folder so you don't have to search for them.

Cooking, Shopping and Cleaning

Cooking meals

Cooking a meal is a complex affair, which requires the coordination of several tasks in a particular order. Remembering which step comes before another could become more difficult. Instead of relying on your memory, use a recipe book.

Write out the ingredients and the step-by-step instructions in a special book or use a set of card files. This may seem silly for something you have cooked for years, but it will reduce reliance on memory. You don't have to keep thinking about what you have done already and what needs to be done next.

The **Easy Cook Book** has step-by-step easy recipes with pictorial instructions. Shopping cards are also provided with the list and photo of all of the ingredients required. You could also create your own shopping cards for your favourite recipes.

To make it easier to use cooking appliances, a sheet with step-by-step instructions next to the appliance is simple and effective. If possible, get instruction sheets laminated for protection. Some other ideas for you and your family to make cooking easier include:

- Creating a folder of your favourite and most regularly cooked recipes in plastic sleeves. Each step can be crossed off with a washable marker and then re-used.
- Make meal times a family occasion once or twice a week, where each family member is involved in the cooking. Serve familiar foods that the whole family enjoys.
- Re-arranging and re-organising the kitchen space may assist in reducing clutter and simplifying the environment.
- To reduce complexity, try using a maximum of 4 or 5 ingredients.

Make meal preparation simpler

It takes a lot of mental energy to concentrate on the stovetop, the oven, and the microwave all at the same time. So try cooking the meal by using just one appliance – the stovetop, the oven, or the microwave.

Reduce the number of steps to prepare food by buying pre-cut fresh or frozen vegetables. Most supermarkets have pre-cut broccoli, pumpkin, and lettuce in packets. Other pre-prepared foods can be purchased in convenient packets too.

A weekly or fortnightly meal routine, such as spaghetti on Mondays and lamb chop on Tuesdays, will help maintain a balanced diet through the week. It will also take the pressure off menu planning.

Find out if there are home delivered meal services in your area for days when you don't feel like cooking. You might like to treat yourself to a home delivered lasagne or fish and chips once a week from a local take out place that delivers. Frozen meals from the supermarket are handy when you don't feel like cooking. If you aren't used to having frozen meals, or are not sure how to heat them, this may not be the answer. Other options include, visiting your local senior citizens club, community centre or church group, or soup kitchen, which may offer suitable meal options on a low budget.

Home delivered meals that can be “ready to eat” or “heat and eat” are also available at a low cost. A few options include, Meals on Wheels, Tender Loving Cuisine, and Lite N' Easy. **Home delivered groceries**, where your fresh ingredients are delivered to your house for a small delivery fee, are also available from shops such as Coles Home Delivery, Woolworths Home Delivery, Hello Fresh, and Aussie Farmers Direct.

Devices to assist with cooking

There are a number of devices that are able to simplify the process of cooking, so that it is easier and safer. Most of these products can be found on the [Independent Living Centre](#) website.

Kitchen timers are available in analogue and electronic, which can help time stovetop or oven cooking. This will help remind you that you have to attend to something that is on the stove or oven. Timers can be found at most big department stores.

Food processors or other electric and manual **chopping appliances** can be used to reduce the need to chop vegetables by hand, thus decreasing the need to always be using sharp knives. These are available from various department stores. Consider the amount of assembly needed prior to use and ease of washing up afterwards. A long handled brush can be used to scrub areas that are sharp or hard to get to.



Kitchen Safety

Personal safety when in the kitchen is vital to maintain health and perform kitchen tasks effectively. There are a variety of products available to ensure you are safe when cooking. Some are mentioned below; for more detail, please contact your local [Independent Living Centre](#).

Safe T Element (stove safety element) can be installed to prevent fire on electric coil stoves by limiting element plate temperature to 350 degrees Celsius.

Microwave Time Delay Switches can be used as it allows power to the microwave for a set period, then automatically cuts power off at a specific time, increasing safety in kitchen.

Thermostatic mixing valves can be installed to control the maximum temperature of water to prevent scalding.

For information on other safety devices and environmental control units, such as gas leak detectors, power point timers, and stove isolation tools, please refer to the section on [Remembering Things](#).

Food safety and hygiene

Maintaining good food safety practices is an important aspect of continuing to live independently. It is important to keep the kitchen clean and tidy to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria that can lead to food poisoning. The following tips will assist you in keeping the kitchen a healthy, bacteria-free zone:

- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly before and after handling food.
- Keep kitchen surfaces, including the oven and stovetop, clean and wipe down daily to prevent germs from accumulating.
- Do not leave high-risk food (food that goes off quickly) at room temperature for more than 2 hours (e.g.: milk, meat, fish, cheese).
- Throw out high-risk foods if they have been left out of the fridge overnight or for more than 2 hours. If in doubt, throw it out.
- Prevent cross contamination of bacteria by using separate chopping boards for different food (e.g.: bread board, meat board).

- Label all food with name and date. Cook red meat and chicken within 2 days of purchase or freeze straight away.
- Store raw meat in plastic bags on the bottom shelf of the fridge to prevent leakage and dripping onto other food.
- Cooked food should be placed in the refrigerator within 2 hours of cooking.
- Reheat leftovers once only.
- Propping the fridge up at the front may assist the door to close on its own.
- Clear out and rearrange the contents of the fridge weekly.

Shopping

Some people always shop with a list, but others leave it to memory as they tour the supermarket shelves. If you have not used a list before, get into the habit of creating and using a shopping list each time you shop.

A good place to keep the shopping list is in the same place as your diary and memory board (see [Communicating and Conversing](#)). As you run out of items or remember things you need, write them down on the list. Take the list with you when you go shopping.

If you have used the Internet for buying things, but haven't done grocery shopping this way, this might be a good time to start. You can save shopping lists and see what you bought last time. Both can help you remember what you need. Although there is a delivery fee, you are saving on transport and the worry of getting home with heavy bags.

Some other suggestions to help you with your shopping include:

- Tick off each item on your shopping list as you go.
- Find an escorted shopping service (e.g.: local charity or community group) that offer transport or shopping assistance.
- Buy food that will last, e.g.: milk powder, frozen vegetables, or extra bread for the freezer.
- Buy only what you need for the week and ensure all ingredients are fresh.
- It may be possible to set up a weekly delivery of home essentials on an ongoing basis.

Safety and Security

Feeling safe

Feeling safe at home is important at all times. It becomes especially important if you are worried about getting help if you have an accident or become unwell.

Emergencies


Emergency incidents often require quick thinking, but it might be difficult to act quickly and remember whom to contact. Keep a reminder note next to the home telephone with the name and number of whom to contact in an emergency. If your home phone has speed dial buttons, it is possible to programme your emergency contacts into the phone. This means only one button needs to be pressed in an emergency. See section on 'Remembering Telephone Numbers' for more information.

Emergency call systems

Emergency Call Systems allow you to call for assistance. Pressing a button on a pendant or wrist strap makes the call. There are many brands and systems available. Some call pre-programmed phone numbers of family or friends to alert them. Others connect to a call centre, which is staffed 24 hours a day. There are systems that offer a two-way intercom where you can speak to a person who will help. Some pendants and wrist straps can be worn in the shower and the garden. This type of device may be helpful in early stages of dementia, but remembering to activate the transmitter may become more difficult with time. Another option that can be considered is fall detectors, which can be worn and generate an alert automatically in the event it is triggered by vertical drop, provided it is worn on the person at all times. Whilst this may assist with emergency management, it is not a foolproof system, and would not be effective if an individual was, for example, locked in the bathroom. If this is a likely situation, one way to assist with this is to have a clearly seen and labelled assistance button that can be used in higher risk areas in the house (e.g.: bathroom, kitchen).

Sensors

Sensors that can monitor smoke, gas, flooding, activity, and unlocked doors, can be used in conjunction with some emergency call systems for home protection. Both [Tunstall Emergency Call Systems](#) and [Medi-Call Dialler Unit](#) have these options. Their call centre staff will call you or your family to clarify the problem and can contact the relevant emergency services to deal with the incidents. Although these centres will monitor other amenities, you will need a nominated person to



organise the services required, e.g.: to contact the gas company in the event of a gas leak.

Alarms and monitoring systems

Smoke alarms are essential in any home, but it is important to replace the batteries every twelve months. In case you have difficulty remembering what to do if the alarm sounds, you can have your smoke alarm connected to a call centre. They will give advice and contact a nominated neighbour or relative to assist.

Some of the range of personal safety alarms and monitors available are listed below:

- **Portable noisemakers:** Handheld alarms which alert the person's neighbours/carers of problems.
- **Personal Alarm Call Systems:** Emergency call units that sits with the telephone and include a body worn transmitter button on a neck pendant or wristband.
- **Fixed Call Button:** An assistance button in affixed in a particular spot. May call for assistance locally or offsite.
- **Fall Detectors:** Alert system which can be activated by a fall occurring or by pressing the SOS call button.
- **GPS tracking systems:** Mobile phone based emergency call and GPS location system. Other options include watches with a GPS feature, mobile applications, and purpose built mobile phones with inbuilt GPS features.

There are also some inexpensive and less obtrusive methods of monitoring a person's safety, such as, community courtesy calls. Some of the options are listed below:

- **Red Cross Telecross Service:** Free telephone service that assists elderly people with a daily phone call to check on their safety and wellbeing. Contact 1300 885 698.
- **St John's Ambulance Call Service:** A courtesy call service for a small fee at a pre-arranged time.

Locks and Doors

If you are locked in a room because a lock gets stuck, it can be very distressing, especially if you are alone in the house. Remove all internal locks to prevent locking yourself in a room. If you must have a lock on a door, install one with a simple slide or turn action so it is easy to move and easy to remember how it operates.

The **Rescue Door System** is designed to rescue people from a locked room. When the doorframe is pressed the door is released. Alternatively, install doors with special unlocking features or hinges that lift off. But remember both these products require another person to help you get out of the room if you are locked inside. If your bathroom is small and has an inward opening door, you there may be the risk of the door being unable to open if blocked internally (e.g.: if a person fell to the floor). You may wish to consider rehanging the door or using a hinge system such as the **Smart Door**, which allows a door to swing in and out. This may make access easier if the door ever got blocked internally.

Home automation technology enables you to control most electrical items in your home via alternative access methods, such as, remote controls, timers, motion detection, or even voice control through a smartphone. It may be possible to set up a schedule or parameters for locking and unlocking doors.

Some other tips to keep you safe at home include:

- Following all usual safety precautions when you leave your home unattended, including, locking up thoroughly and making your home look occupied (e.g.: leave some lights on at night time).
- Do not leave keys in predictable spots (e.g.: underneath flower pots).
- Avoid leaving notes on external doors of the home, as this is a giveaway that you are not home.
- Install an external sensor light that automatically turns on when someone enters a particular area.
- Ask a neighbour or friend to help get your mail and keep an eye on your house if away for any extended period of time.
- Install a peep-hole or security screen on the front door to keep additional barriers between you and any person you don't know.
- Read the office of [Fair Trading Seniors Guide](#) to avoid common scams and protect your consumer rights.
- If you or someone you know may be at risk of harm or abuse, contact the NSW Elder Abuse Helpline on 1800 628 221.

Taking Tablets

Getting organised

Forgetting to take medication, taking them twice, or taking them at the wrong time of day can be a common mistake. There are a variety of methods that can be employed to ensure you take the correct medication at the assigned time.

Your pharmacist can supply all of your prescriptions at a regular time, e.g.: giving you all your medication at the start of each month for the rest of the month. They can make a list of all the medication you are taking and what each one is for, so you don't become confused about what you are taking.

It might also be useful for your family and friends to know what medications you are taking, so they can assist you if and when you need it.

Taking the right tablets

There are many ways and tools you can use to ensure you are taking the correct medication. Assistance may be required to ensure you are set up correctly.

Blister packs – your pharmacist can pack a week's medication into separate clear compartments, each labelled with the name of the tablet and dosage, the day, and time it is to be taken. You can also choose to have your name and photo at the top so if someone is helping you, they know they are giving the right medication to the right person.



Pill openers – Sometimes it may be hard to open your blister pack and pop out your medication. The Pil-Bob Blisterpack Opener is a small round plastic device designed to make removing tablets easier. It tears the foil at the back of the blister pack and catches the pills as they fall out. Alternatively you can place a bowl under your blister pack and then push your pills out into this.

Weekly tablet containers – If you prefer to organise your own medication, or have a family member help you, you can purchase clear, weekly tablet containers from your pharmacist. These have either a sliding, or a flip top lid and can have a number of compartments (e.g. morning, midday, evening, and bedtime) for each day. They may have clear labels in contrasting colours. There are a variety of brands available from your pharmacist.



Electronic pill boxes – These containers incorporate storage compartments with built-in reminder alarms to remind you when you take your medication. The pill boxes can be set for multiple reminders per day depending on your dosage requirements. There are a variety of brands and each can be set in accordance with your needs. Some are more easily altered than others, if your medication dosages change with time. It is also possible to get a reminder system that is not on a pill box.



Automated pill dispensers – These help you remember both the tablets and the time to take them. They contain compartments that can be set at a programmed time to alarm and open. When the alarm sounds, a controlled dosage of medication is released. The device then repeats this process for the next programmed time.

Taking the tablets at the right time

It is important to establish a routine that suits the type of medication you're taking, e.g.: taking tablets during meal times. This can act as a reminder for you to take your medication, however, sometimes this system may not be reliable e.g.: if there is a loss of appetite, or eating habits change.

All alarm systems require the ability to associate the alarm sound with the need to take medication. There are reminder systems that allow specific instructions to be recorded as the timed alarm, which may include instructions on how to take your pills. These however, may need to be set up either with your medication, or where you may tend to be.

There are also a variety of applications available from The App Store, or Play Store that can be downloaded to your mobile phone or tablet device and set to remind you of when you need to take your medication, if you already use a smartphone or tablet regularly.

Getting to Places

Using public transport

If you have early stage dementia and you are still driving, you need to find other ways of getting about once you are unable to drive.

Find out what public transport services are available in your area. Get timetables of services, find out where bus stops, train stations and taxi ranks are, and start using public transport regularly. It might be helpful to have a family member accompany you for a few trips while you familiarise yourself with various routes. Being able to get out and about to social activities and shopping is very important for your general health.

Finding a destination

Going to familiar places will probably not be a problem. But going to new places might be, so you will need to **plan your route** and possibly arrange another person to accompany you. If you are good at reading maps, you may find a road map useful for travelling on foot, bus, train or car.

Some people prefer to have **written directions** instead of, or in addition to maps, as this can include more detail like mode of transport to be used. Interactive maps available from websites such as www.whereis.com.au and [Google Maps](#) provide both a map of the location and written instructions on how to get there from your current location, often in reference to a selected mode of transport. Take a copy of your destination and home address so you can ask for assistance if necessary.

There are also a variety of applications available from The App Store or Play Store that can be downloaded to your mobile phone or tablet device, such as Trip Planner, which automatically work out the simplest route and provide you with bus numbers, and train times.

Finding your way around

Take the same route to all the places you visit regularly and if being driven by someone else, ask them to take you on the same route that you take, whether by foot or bus. By making the route a habit, it will help you remember it for longer.

Using a standard map can be difficult when you don't know where you are in the first place. If you are familiar with a **GPS** (Global Positioning System) device, continue to use it. Alternatively, most mobile phones nowadays have an inbuilt GPS system. Make sure the "location services" is turned on and familiarise yourself with the application so you know how to use it when you are out. Some smartphone applications can also tell you where you are and how to get to your destination, similar to a vehicle GPS. You will need to enter your destination so refer to a copy of your destination address so you can enter this in or have it entered before you leave home.



Identification cards and **bracelets** can help other people get you home safely if you lose your way. Alzheimer's Australia has a bracelet that carries a personal identification code. The police use a database, which lists individuals' personal contact details. Anyone offering help can look at the bracelet, telephone the police and quote the personal code. The police then make arrangements for you to return home safely.

State and Territory website addresses for public transport information

State	Phone	Website
New South Wales	131 500	www.transportnsw.info
Australian Capital Territory	13 22 81	www.transport.act.gov.au
Victoria	1800 800 007	www.ptv.vic.gov.au
Queensland	13 12 30	www.translink.com.au
Tasmania	13 22 01	www.metrotas.com.au
South Australia	1300 311 108	www.adelaidemetro.com.au
Western Australia	13 62 13	www.transperth.wa.gov.au
Northern Territory	(08) 8924 7666	www.transport.nt.gov.au/public/about-us

Product Listing

Creating Accessible Environments

- Natural cues
- Contrasting colours
- Sensor lights
- Smart doors
- Open shelving

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Around the House

- Create routines
- Group related items
- Automate
- Labels and signs
- Vision glow strips
- Automatic timer switches
- Home automation system

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Communicating and Conversing

- Message centre
- Desk diary
- Contact book
- Picture dialling telephones
- Skype
- Wayne's hospital kit
- Medic-Alert
- Alzheimer's Australia identification card
- Emergency call systems
- Safety home bracelet
- Personal alarm systems with GPS

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Money Management

- PayPass/ PayWave
- Internet banking

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Remembering Things

- Calendar clocks
- Radio alarm clocks
- Pictorial calendar
- Reminder alerts
- Photo album
- Electronic photo frames
- Wireless Key Finder
- StickNFind Finder Stickers
- Drawer dividers
- Clear containers
- Motion Activated Memo Reminder
- GE Keysafe
- Supra Electric Key Safe
- Biometric door lock
- Sensor taps
- Magiplug
- Tunstall Flood Detector Sensors
- Vigil Aide Electric and Gas stove Isolation System
- Stove Guard Motion Sensor
- Knob cover
- Gas leak detector
- Power point timers

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Cooking, Shopping and Cleaning

- Easy Cook Book
- Home delivered meals
- Home delivered groceries
- Kitchen timers
- Food processors
- Chopping appliances
- Safe T Element
- Microwave Time Delay Switch
- Thermostatic mixing valve

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Safety and Security

- Tunstall Emergency Call Systems
- Medi-Call Dialler Unit
- Personal noisemakers
- Personal alarm call system
- Fall detectors
- GPS tracking
- Rescue door system
- Smart Door

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Taking Tablets

- Blister packs
- Pill openers
- Weekly tablet containers
- Electronic pill boxes
- Automated pill dispensers

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Getting to Places

- Plan your route
- Written directions
- GPS
- Identification cards and bracelet

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Independent Living Centres

New South Wales

PO Box 8034, Westpoint Blacktown
2148

Website: www.ilcnsw.asn.au

Phone: (02) 9912 5800

Fax: (02) 8814 9656

Email: help@ilcnsw.asn.au

Australian Capital Territory
24 Parkinson Street, Weston ACT 2611

Phone: (02) 6205 1900

Fax: (02) 6205 1906

Email: ilcact@act.gov.au

Queensland
PO Box 3241, Newmarket QLD 4051
Website: www.lifetec.org.au

Phone: (07) 3552 9000

Fax: (07) 3552 9088

Email: mail@lifetec.org.au

South Australia
11 Blacks Road, Giles Plains SA 5086
Website:
www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/services/disability-services/independent-living-centre

Phone: (08) 8266 5260

Fax: (08) 8266 5263

Email: ilcsa@dcsl.sa.gov.au

Tasmania
275 Wellington Street, South Launceston
TAS 7249
Website: www.ilctas.asn.au/

Phone: (03) 6334 5899

Fax: (03) 6334 0045

Email: ilc@ilctas.asn.au

Victoria
PO Box 1101, Altona Gate VIC 3025
Website: www.yooralla.com.au

Phone: (03) 9362 6111

Fax: (03) 9314 9825

Email: ilc@yooralla.com.au

Western Australia
The Niche Suite A, 11 Aberdare Road,
Nedlands WA 6009
Website: www.ilc.com.au

Phone: (08) 9381 0600

Fax: (08) 9381 0611

Email: help@ilc.com.au

National Telephone: 1300 885 886
National Website: www.ilcaustralia.org

Alzheimer's Australia

National Dementia Helpline	Phone: 1800 100 500
Interpreter Service	Phone: 13 14 50
National Website	www.fightdementia.org.au
National Office PO Box 4194, Kingston ACT 2604	Phone: (02) 6278 8900 Email: nat.admin@alzheimers.org.au
Australian Capital Territory PO Box 7100, Kaleen ACT 2617	Phone: (02) 6255 0722 Fax: (02) 6255 0499 Email: ACT.Admin@alzheimers.org.au
New South Wales Macquarie Hospital Building 21, 120 Coxs & Norton Roads North Ryde NSW 2113	Phone: (02) 9805 0100 Fax: (02) 8875 4665 Email: nsw.admin@alzheimers.org.au
Northern Territory PO Box 515 Nightcliff NT 0814	Phone: (08) 8948 5228 Fax: (08) 8948 5229 Email: nt.admin@alzheimers.org.au
Queensland PO Box 8141 Woolloongabba QLD 4102	Phone: (07) 3895 8200 Fax: (07) 3895 8266 Email: qld.general@alzheimers.org.au
South Australia 27 Conyngham Street, Glenside SA 5065	Phone: (08) 8372 2100 Fax: (08) 8338 3390 Email: sa.admin@alzheimers.org.au
Tasmania 85 Creek Road, New Town GPO Box 1606 Hobart TAS 7001	Phone: (03) 6279 1100 Fax: (03) 6228 3031 Email: tas.admin@alzheimers.org.au
Victoria Locked Bag 3001, Hawthorn VIC 3122	Phone: (03) 9815 7800 Fax: (03) 9815 7801 Email: alz@alzheimers.org.au
Western Australia 55 Walters Drive Osborne Park WA 6017	Phone: (08) 9388 2800 Fax: (08) 9388 2739 Email: alzwa@alzheimers.org.au

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Helpful Handbook for Memory Loss



Endless Possibilities for All