

# Bathroom Adaptations & Dementia

Key Considerations for Occupational Therapists and Specifiers



## Introduction

Dementia is an umbrella term to describe over 100 different specific dementia types, the most common being Alzheimer's Disease. Dementia is a disease of the brain, and everyone's brain is individual. These two facts combine to give the outcome that:

**Everyone's dementia is individual and affects them and their behaviour differently.**

It is likely that at some point as the dementia progresses, a person's memory, processing skills, perception, cognition, communication, and mobility will be affected.

The brain is a person's "central computer" and affects everything they do. This includes day-to-day tasks such as personal hygiene. Tasks that were once familiar - bathing, washing, using the toilet, or navigating the room - may become confusing, overwhelming, or unsafe.

### Our Approach

At Astor Bannerman, we work closely with Occupational Therapists, families, and care teams to design bathroom environments that support both physical and cognitive needs. When living with dementia, small details in the environment can make a significant difference

The right approach to support depends on:

- The person
- The type and stage of their dementia
- The impact on their physical ability and mobility
- The impact on their understanding, processing and sequencing
- Sensory and perceptual changes
- Communication difficulties
- The home environment
- Carer involvement and support

The key priority is creating a bathroom environment that is safe, calming, familiar, and easy to understand - helping reduce anxiety and support independence for as long as possible.

# Core Considerations



## 1. Familiarity and routine

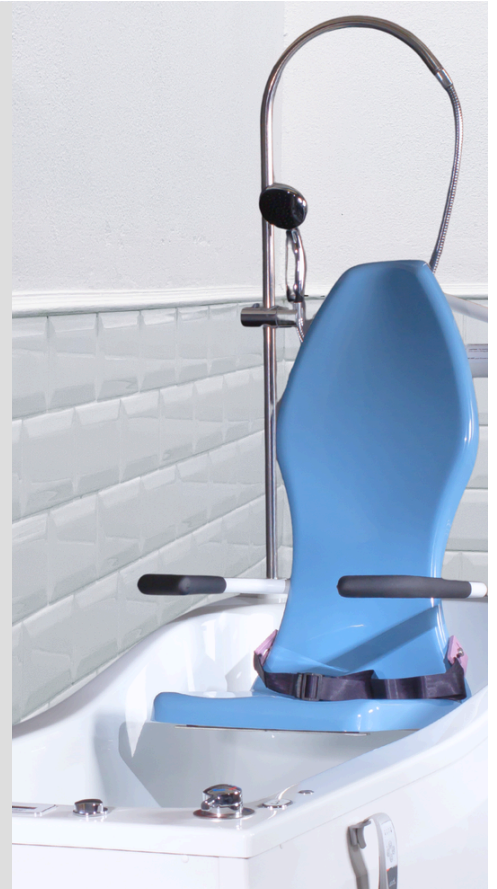
- Familiar environments help reduce confusion and distress
- Sudden changes in layout or appearance may increase anxiety
- Maintaining consistent routines can support confidence and independence

## 2. Colour and contrast

- Dementia can affect depth perception and visual interpretation
- Good colour contrast can help important items stand out more clearly. This may include contrasting:
  - toilet seats against the WC
  - coloured bath seat against the white tub
  - grab rails against walls
  - floors, walls, and sanitaryware

However:

- Very bold patterns or highly reflective surfaces may cause confusion or distress
- Strong contrasts on flooring can sometimes be perceived as steps or holes
- Colour should be used thoughtfully to support orientation and usability.



## 3. Lighting

- Poor lighting can increase disorientation and risk of falls
- Even, shadow-free lighting is important
- Natural light can help support orientation throughout the day. Consider:
  - Avoiding glare and reflections
  - Minimising sudden changes in light levels
  - Supporting visibility at night where required

# Core Considerations



## 4. Safety and falls prevention

- Reduced balance, mobility, and awareness can increase falls risk
- Clear layouts and uncluttered spaces are important
- Non-slip flooring and safe transfer support should be considered
- Avoid rugs and bathmats

## 5. Bathing and washing

- Bathing may become confusing or distressing for some individuals
- Fear of water depth, noise, or unfamiliar equipment may increase anxiety. The environment should support:
  - Calm, predictable routines
  - Gentle communication
  - Safe and dignified assistance where needed
  - Safely entering a bath
- Bed washing or basin washing is likely to be undignified and less hygienic
- Overhead showers can be scary and disorientating and may be less dignified if care is needed
- Safe shower chairs that offer secure seating



## 6. Wayfinding and orientation

- Clear visual cues can support independence. This may include:
  - Clearly visible toilets and basins
  - Traditional recognisable equipment
  - Simple signage or symbols where appropriate
  - Simple cupboard or drawer labelling
  - Avoiding visual clutter

## 7. Sensory considerations

- People living with dementia may become more sensitive to noise, temperature, or overstimulation
- Calm, comfortable environments are often more supportive



# Equipment and Adaptation Options: Benefits & Considerations

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Adaptations should support both physical safety and cognitive accessibility.



## Bathing Solutions

### Options may include:

- Height-adjustable baths
- Assisted bathing systems
- Baths with powered seats for easy access
- Colour contrasted bath seats

### Considerations:

- Ease of transfer
- Reducing fear or distress
- Supporting comfort and relaxation
- Balancing independence with safety

## Washbasins and Washing Areas

### Options may include:

- Accessible basins
- Height-adjustable solutions
- Level access showers or wet rooms
- Simple colour contrasted controls

### Considerations:

- Ease of understanding and use
- Visibility and accessibility
- Supporting familiar routines

## Toilet Solutions

### Options may include:

- Accessible WCs
- Raised seat
- Colour contrasted seat
- Grab rails and positioning aids

### Considerations:

- Visibility and recognition
- Safe transfers
- Supporting dignity and continence management

## Changing and Personal Care

For individuals requiring support with personal care:

### Considerations may include:

- Safe carer access
- Comfortable positioning
- Minimising distress during care routines
- Routines that avoid the carer getting wet!
- Height adjustable equipment to minimise back strain
- Hoist and lift equipment

## Hoisting and Transfer Support

### Options may include:

- Ceiling track hoists
- Mobile floor hoists
- Sit-to-stand aids

### Considerations:

- Reducing physical strain
- Maintaining comfort and reassurance
- Supporting predictable and safe routines



## The Key Question...

When planning a bathroom adaptation, ask:

**How can this environment support the individual to feel safe, calm, and as independent as possible?**

This includes considering:

- Physical accessibility
- Cognitive accessibility
- Familiarity and reassurance
- Ease of navigation
- Sensory experience

## Person-Centred Decision Making

Every individual living with dementia will experience the condition differently.

Adaptations should always reflect:

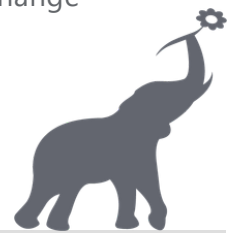
- The person's routines and preferences
- Their level of understanding and mobility
- The support available from carers or family
- How the environment is used day-to-day
- The best outcomes come from understanding the person - not just the diagnosis
- An understanding that dementia is a degenerative disease – plan for the future

## Key Takeaway

A well-designed bathroom can help reduce anxiety, support independence, and improve safety for people living with dementia.

The best outcomes come from:

- Thoughtful design with contrasting colours
- Clear, accessible environments
- Appropriate and recognisable equipment
- Familiar routines
- Ongoing review as needs change



## Clinical Disclaimer

This guidance is intended to support discussion and informed decision-making. It does not replace clinical assessment or individual medical advice.

Bathroom adaptations and equipment selection should always be based on a comprehensive assessment and the individual's care needs, in consultation with appropriate healthcare professionals.

Astor Bannerman does not provide medical advice but has a team of accredited Trusted Assessors who work collaboratively with Occupational Therapists and care teams to support safe, person-centred bathroom design.