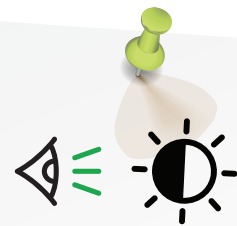


COLOUR AND CONTRAST

How can colour and contrast be used to best effect to support people living with dementia in a residential care home?

As a person gets older, their eyesight can be affected in a range of ways, including making it harder to distinguish between colours. Similar colours may blend into each other. Colours can also look different depending on the time of day. For a person living with dementia, too many colours in the one place can be distracting and stressful, as the brain has to work hard to make sense of all the visual information it is receiving. Colour preference is also personal, often associated with our memories or cultural background.

Good use of colour can make for a more appealing living environment. However, as people get older and may have difficulty making sense of the colours they are seeing, the deliberate use of light and dark tones (contrast) becomes more important. Contrast can be used to highlight objects and areas such as a dining chair and a garden door entry, or to disguise areas that may pose a danger to the resident (e.g. chemical storeroom).



Contrast can be used effectively to draw a person's attention to key features and areas. Lack of contrast can reduce the attention towards unimportant objects and areas.



What you can do now

- ☐ When choosing a particular colour, consider how it will contribute to the current environment. Remember, many colours may appear grey to the ageing eye; contrast may be more important.
- ☐ Take a photo in black and white to see which furniture and features stand out or blend into the background.
- ☐ Use contrast to highlight doors and areas you want to encourage residents to enter.
- ☐ Use contrast to highlight objects you want residents to clearly see (e.g. toilet seats, light switches and crockery).
- ☐ Minimise contrast for areas that are not important to residents, such as doors to staff only rooms and cupboards (e.g. match the door colour with the wall).



What you can plan for the future

- ☐ Before building or renovating, consult a colour design professional with knowledge and experience in implementing the principles of dementia-friendly design.
- ☐ Design an overall colour scheme that includes contrast of fixtures, furniture and fittings.
- ☐ Provide clear contrast between horizontal and vertical surfaces (e.g. between floors and walls).
- ☐ Combine colour and contrast to promote movement and engagement (e.g. well defined pathway, chairs against the wall and floor).
- ☐ Avoid contrast in floor finishes that residents may perceive as a step or hole (such as in floor patterns or strong contrast between different flooring materials).

Key Design Principles: Principle 1 Unobtrusively reduce risk, Principle 3 Allow people to see and be seen, Principle 4. Reduce unhelpful stimulation, Principle 5 Optimise helpful stimulation, Principle 6 Support movement and engagement, <https://dta.com.au/resources/environmental-design-resources-introduction>

Aged Care Quality Standards: Standard 5 Requirement (a) The service environment is welcoming and easy to understand, and optimises each consumer's sense of belonging, independence, interaction and function.

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