

Memory Moment

Home Safe Home

By: Amy Sobrino, MSW, co-founder of Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness

An essential aspect of dementia caregiving is managing the home environment. Unknowingly, there may be hazards and risks causing your loved one to harm themselves. Here are some ideas for simple and affordable home modifications that can help put your mind at ease and help prevent these accidents.

Drawer & Cabinet Locks

Simple locks can help keep items that could be potentially harmful for your loved one out of their reach. Most commonly, I see caregivers who have challenges with their loved ones messing with their medications and often losing them around the house, causing panic for their family. Other times, drawer and cabinet locks are used to keep items like knives or guns out of their reach. One type of lock that I especially like is the magnetic safety lock from brands like Safety 1st. These are available on Amazon for around \$30 for 8 locks.

Microwave & Oven Locks

One of the most common safety hazards I see are microwaves and ovens. Many times caregivers will say that their loved one forgets to check on food, or forgets to put a timer on which usually results in ruined appliances and burnt food, if not worse. A simple solution is unplugging any appliances while they are not in use. If this does not work for you, there are simple and inexpensive locks that will accomplish the same goal. Check out Safety 1st's Multi-purpose Appliance Lock. For a little under \$5 on Amazon, you can purchase two locks to use in your home.

Door Alarms & Locks

If you missed last month's *Memory Moment*, there are simple door alarms and locks that can help alert you if your loved one is on the move. For \$10 on Amazon, you can purchase a set of two GE Personal Security Door Alarms that either release a buzzer or chime tone when a door is opened. This helps caregivers know if their loved one goes outside, especially if they are busy working around the house or in a different room. While this does not prevent your loved one from going outside, it will alert you when that happens. Another

item to invest in would be a lock that is placed on the door either very high or very low on the door. A person with dementia might be able to open the lock they are used to on the door, but will have difficulty with one that is not in the line of sight.

Uneven Surfaces/Poor Lighting

This combination leads to an increase in falls. Making a clear, lighted path for your loved one throughout the home can help prevent falls. Some ideas to implement include a nightlight or motion detector light that will come on only when there is activity. Try Mr. Beams indoor/outdoor motion detecting light on Amazon for a little under \$30. This is able to be mounted to a wall so it is out of the path of your loved one. Reducing clutter will also help them with navigating around the home.

Bathroom Safety

Utilizing equipment such as grab bars and a bath bench can be helpful when preventing falls and ensuring your loved one's safety. Because of the changes going on in your loved one's brain, depth perception is often affected. This becomes more difficult in the bathroom as the tile, fixtures, and accessories are often monochrome, it may be hard for your loved one to distinguish one surface or item from the next. Try using colored tape to clearly mark the edge of the bathtub/shower, grab bars, bath bench, and anything else you think would be helpful.

Remember – caregiving is trial and error. Experiment with some of the things mentioned above, and see what works!

For more information about Memory Moment & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver and have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.