Talk to the experts

If you work in specialist housing for the elderly, contact us today to book a dementia-friendly bathroom consultation with a member of our 60-strong team of sales and surveying experts. They can tailor a solution to your specific resident, building and budget needs. You can request a visit at www.akw-ltd.co.uk/dementia or alternatively contact us using the details below.

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About AKW

AKW are the leading designers and manufacturers of accessible bathroom and kitchen products having supplied this specialist market for over 25 years. We supply the majority of social landlords, local authorities and care and nursing home groups in the UK as well as customers internationally. We work closely with OTs and other healthcare professionals when designing our products to ensure they meet the specific needs of our end users. Our broad range of products include:

- specialist care showers (electric and mixer showers)
- wet room (level access showering) kits
- low level shower trays
- safety shower screens and curtains
- raised height sanitaryware with paddle flushes and seats designed for side transfer
- Geberit shower toilets
- lever taps
- grab rails
- Doc M packs
- accessible kitchens with optional ActivMotion® rise and fall units
The AKW Guide to Creating Dementia-Friendly Bathrooms
Dementia-Friendly Bathrooms
- an introduction

This guide summarises best practice design advice for creating dementia-friendly bathrooms with guidance provided by leading healthcare and building design experts. All aspects of bathroom design including lighting, flooring, taps, showers and heating are covered. We also explore some specific safety challenges and how they can be best overcome with the careful selection of products.

Who is this guide for?
This guide has been produced for all those involved in dementia care:
• health and care professionals
• relatives and carers
• specifiers and contractors involved in bathroom adaptations
• social landlords

What is a dementia-friendly bathroom?
A dementia-friendly bathroom is one where simple but careful consideration of design can reduce the barriers that people with dementia can face in carrying out daily living activities, greatly improving their safety and preserving their independence for as long as possible. This guide highlights special design considerations and the safest types of bathroom products to address them.
Reason 1: As our population ages, dementia is becoming much more prevalent

Key Facts

- There are more than 800,000 people living with dementia in the UK
- 163,000 new cases of dementia are diagnosed in England and Wales each year
- With a new case diagnosed every 3.2 minutes in England and Wales alone, that figure is forecast to rise to over 1 million in the next seven years
- 20% of those aged 80+ have dementia
- 80% of care and nursing home residents have some degree of dementia or severe memory problems
- On average 30% of people in acute hospitals have dementia

Reason 2: The bathroom is one of the most challenging and dangerous places for a person with dementia

Dementia can cause someone’s perception of danger to steadily diminish and the bathroom can become a dangerous and confusing place. People with dementia are twice as likely to fall and these falls result in significantly higher mortality rates than for others in the same age group.

Hazards are numerous and include trip points, slippery floors, hot water and confusing layouts. What was once a comfortable and familiar room can become a challenging and sometimes frightening place that can cause upset, frustration and a reluctance to use the bathroom.
Our design guidance is split into two sections:

1. Protecting the Individual
   A person-centric approach to bathroom design for people with dementia. This section highlights the unique challenges that the condition presents and gives simple bathroom design and product selection guidance to safely meet those challenges.

2. Product guide
   The second section is a simple product guide that deals with each essential bathroom item and offers advice on selection.
Key considerations: Safety
A person with dementia may over time become less aware of basic dangers such as scalding, so their bathroom has to be made into an ultra-safe and comfortable space.

Key considerations: Familiarity
For some people with dementia, adaptations can be distressing as they may fail to recognise their own bathroom. For those people it may help if a dementia-friendly bathroom adaptation is made as soon as possible after a dementia diagnosis has been given. This gives the person time to familiarise themselves with their new bathroom products and layout.

A dementia-friendly bathroom doesn’t need to cost any more than a standard bathroom adaptation
Products needed for a dementia-friendly bathroom don’t usually cost any more than those for a standard bathroom adaptation for the elderly, but it is essential that the most appropriate ones are chosen and that design guidelines regarding product colour etc. are followed to maximise the safety and comfort of the person with dementia.
Protecting the individual
- Seven major dementia challenges

#1 - Protection against scalding

Someone with dementia may progressively lose safety awareness and as a result they will become more vulnerable to scalding.

Requirements & Considerations

1. Select thermostatic taps and showers
2. Use LST (low surface temperature) radiators or under-floor heating. Don’t leave pipework exposed as this can get extremely hot. If the person is prone to falling (see below) consider under-floor heating

#2 - Fall protection

Dementia sufferers are twice as likely to fall as others in their age group, and have a three times greater mortality rate three months later as a result.

Requirements & Considerations

1. Avoid sharp edges on any product in the bathroom
2. Remove the bath and install a level access shower to reduce trip hazards. Include a shower seat to reduce the likelihood of falling when showering
3. Choose PET plastic shower screens, not glass
4. Consider installing under-floor heating only so there is no radiator to fall against
5. Choose shower curtains with a breathable fabric to prevent suffocation if the person with dementia passes out, falls and becomes entangled

#3 - Memory loss

Short term memory loss / forgetfulness can lead to a risk of flooding.

Requirements & Considerations

1. Consider selecting a shower that automatically turns off after 30 minutes of use
2. For flood prevention consider using flood-proof plugs or don’t provide a plug at all
#4 - Retro memory

Most people with dementia have good long-term memory but poor short-term and so are more comfortable with familiar fixtures and fittings from the past.

Requirements & Considerations

1. Choose familiar-looking, traditional tap handles and toilet flush controls not push-button or infra-red ones as modern devices can be confusing
2. Ideally select basins that are big enough to accommodate a toothbrush mug

#5 - General confusion

For a minority of people with dementia, the reflection of their own face in a glass shower screen or mirror can frighten them and may lead them to believe another person is using the bathroom.

Requirements & Considerations

1. It is important to include a mirror in a bathroom, but it must be capable of being covered (ideally fit a roller blind or similar to it)

#6 - Floor colour perception

A change in floor colour (in a room or between adjoining rooms/ corridors) can lead a person with dementia to believe there is a step up or down, which on a level surface can cause trips or falls.

Requirements & Considerations

1. Ensure the floor is single colour - avoid the use of level access trays as a person with dementia may assume the colour change from floor to tray means there is a step up or down and fall. The safest solution is a wet room that is fully tiled or safety floored in a single colour
2. Avoid very dark colour flooring as this can be perceived as being a big hole making the dementia sufferer reluctant to step into the bathroom
3. Avoid shiny flooring as this can be perceived as being wet
4. Avoid flecked or small patterned flooring as this can be perceived as having dirt flecks that the person with dementia may try and pick up, leading to the possibility of falling

#7 - Visual confusion

Use contrasting colours to clearly define the showering and toilet areas so the user can safely and effectively locate and use them.

Requirements & Considerations

1. Establish the LRV (Light Reflecting Value) of the colours used - the minimum to achieve good contrast is 30 points of difference
2. The shower curtain and shower seat need to be a different and clearly contrasting plain colour to the wall behind it to make it easy to find the showering area
3. The toilet needs to be a different colour to the wall behind it
4. The toilet seat needs to be a different colour to the toilet pan / cistern
5. Toilet roll holders and grab rails also need to be strongly contrasting colours to the walls they are attached to

Does it have to be red?

There is a common misconception that the only dementia-friendly colour that should be used for grab rails and toilet seats is red. Leading dementia-friendly building design experts, dementia research academics and OTs agree that this is a myth. Whilst red is an acceptable colour to use, other colours are equally as effective, providing they clearly contrast with the wall colour behind them.
**Product guide**
- choosing the right products for your dementia-friendly bathroom

**Showers**
- Choose a thermostatic care shower to guarantee a safe and stable temperature and ideally choose a shower with easy to use and familiar controls.
- Ensure the shower has an adjustable flow as skin can become hyper-sensitive.
- To avoid accidental flooding (if a shower is left running), ideally choose a shower that automatically shuts-down after 30 minutes use.
- Avoid overhead deluge shower heads as these can cause fright. It helps if a dementia sufferer can see where water is coming from and that they can control its flow.
- Ensure shower has controls that are visible against the shower body – i.e. the controls should be a contrasting colour.

**Toilets & Basins**
- Choose a different colour toilet seat to the pan and cistern so the user can easily locate it.
- Choose familiar looking tap controls and toilet flush levers. Avoid push button or infra-red flush controls as these can cause confusion.
- Make sure that the toilet roll holder is a contrasting colour to the wall so it can be easily seen.
- Avoid the use of hidden cisterns.
- Ensure the basin is big enough to accommodate toothbrush mug, toothpaste tube and soap.
- Ideally position the toilet so that it can be seen from the bed – this is especially important in nursing homes.
- Consider using flood-proof plugs that pop-up if the basin overfills or don’t use a plug at all.

**Lighting**
- Dementia sufferers become more sensitive to glare from lights, so maximise natural light where possible.
- Install at least two lights that are positioned to avoid shadows.
- Install task lighting e.g. over the basin, shower and toilet.

**Tiles**
- Avoid patterns and three dimensional representation of objects because these can cause visual confusion.
- Avoid white tiles as these can be seen as being clinical and not homely.

**Storage**
- Use shelves rather than cupboards so that items can be easily found.
- Avoid low level furniture that can be fallen against.
Shower Screens & Curtains

- **Screens** - Ideally choose PET plastic safety screens not safety glass, as being a softer material these reduce the likelihood of impact injury should they be fallen against.
- **Screens** - Choose a frosted screen as these don’t show the reflections that can frighten someone with dementia, making them think that someone else is in the bathroom with them. The added advantage of a frosted screen is that it offers greater dignity if the carer needs to stay in the room.
- **Curtains** - Choose curtains that are a different colour to the walls and the floor. This creates a clearly recognisable showering area. If the bathroom user is susceptible to falls then ensure the curtain fabric is breathable to avoid the danger of suffocation if the curtains are pulled down in a fall.

Flooring

- Avoid flooring that contrasts in tone with flooring in the adjoining bedrooms or corridors, as the colour change can be perceived as a step resulting in falls at the threshold.
- Also ensure that the bathroom floor is a single colour. Avoid the use of level access trays as a person with dementia may assume the colour change means there is a step up or down and this can lead to falls. The safest solution is a wet room that is fully tiled or has safety flooring.
- Non-slip flooring reduces the need for bath mats that can be a trip-hazard.
- Avoid very dark coloured flooring as can look like a large hole, discouraging a dementia suffer from stepping onto it.
- Flooring should be plain and non-reflective. Flecks and speckles can cause confusion as it may look like crumbs or dirt and this can lead to falls if the user tries to pick them up.
- Avoid a shiny floor surface as this can give the appearance of being wet.
- The floor colour must clearly contrast with the walls and sanitaryware.

Heating

- Provide extra heating as tasks take longer to complete.
- Consider using LST (low surface temperature) radiators or under-floor heating, but don’t leave exposed pipework as it can get extremely hot.
- If the person is more prone to fall, consider installing under-floor heating so there is no radiator to fall against.

Doors, Locks & Signage

- It may be necessary to remove the bathroom door lock, or replace it with a lock that can be opened from outside. Someone with dementia may lock themselves in and panic or they may fall and a locked door may delay the carer being able to reach them.
- The door to the bathroom should open outwards in case the person falls against it from the inside, therefore blocking entry.
- Ensure that door into the bathroom contrasts with the walls on both sides.
- Use signs on the bathroom door that include words and pictures as shown above - some people may recognise the word and others may recognise the picture.
AKW Dementia-Friendly Products Featured in this Guide

PET Plastic Shower Screens
AKW's Silverdale care screen panels are made from PET plastic and reduce the risk of impact injury if the person falls against them. The frosted panels help preserve modesty and don't reflect faces like glass or plain plastic panels, something that can frighten someone with dementia.

Curtain
The AKW white shower curtain is made from breathable fabric so is safer if the person with dementia falls and becomes entangled in it.

Shower Seat
AKW's Series 4000 shower seats feature a cushioned back for comfort, plus arms to increase comfort and reduce the danger of falling sideways. Coloured backs and arms make the shower seat easy to locate and it can be folded up to allow access for wheelchair users. Also available as an extra wide model.

iCare Electric Care Shower
The award-winning, RNIB and BEAB Care approved iCare thermostatic care shower switches off after 30 minutes to prevent accidental flooding. Its riser rail also doubles as a secure grab rail.
TMV3 approved Arka Care Mixer Shower
Featured on page 10, with a blue care kit, the Arka delivers up to 19 litres per minute flow versus iCare’s 10-11 litres per minute, making it more suitable for totally immobile users. Its riser rail also doubles as a secure vertical grab rail.

Toilet
AKW’s raised height toilet has an intuitive to use flush handle that is suitable for use by those with arthritis.

Fold-Down Support Rail
AKW’s support rail folds up to allow easier side transfer from a wheelchair and can be supplied with an optional toilet roll holder.

Toilet Seat
AKW’s blue toilet seat features lugs under the seat rim to prevent sideways movement of the seat when side-transferring from a wheelchair.

LST Low Surface Temperature Towel Warmer
The AKW LST electric towel warmer provides touch-safe towel warming. AKW also offer electric and central heating radiators as well as under-floor heating solutions.