

**Familiar not Typical**  
tapware for a dementia  
friendly environment



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# Familiar not typical

“A well designed environment, planned with cognitive impairment in mind, can help maintain abilities and provide meaningful engagement by providing essential prompts, accessibility and reduce risks to support a person with dementia.” ” DEMENTIA ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

**Our environments reflect who we are and provide the tools for us to go about our daily lives. For those with dementia cognitive capabilities may have changed but the importance of their living environment remains the same.**

Changes in cognitive abilities alter how people with dementia interpret what they see, hear, taste, feel and smell. In order to create a dementia-friendly environment it's important to look at how they experience the world

Common features of those living with dementia:\*

- Impairment of reasoning. The results of actions become harder to predict; abstract notions like money become confusing.
- Impairment of memory.

Sufferers forget where they put things, people's names and what they've been doing. The strongest memories may become those from the past.

- Impairment of the ability to learn. New places are disorienting; it's difficult to get used to unfamiliar objects or routines.
- Raised stress levels
- Sensitivity to built and social environments.

The Dementia Enabling Environment Principles, based on the work of Prof Richard Fleming and Kirsty Bennett, University of Wollongong, set out key points for designing an environment to maximise well being for people living with dementia. Some of these principles include:

**Unobtrusively reduce risks** - Provide a safe,

secure environment that is easy to move around in, without obvious barriers or safety features that may anger or agitate people with dementia.

**Allow people to see and be seen** - When people with dementia can see

places such as the lounge room, their bedroom, an outdoor area or bathroom they are more able to make choices and find their way to where they want to go.

**Provide a human scale**

- A person should not be intimidated by the size of the surroundings or confronted with a multitude of interactions and choices. The scale should help the person feel in control.

**Reduce unhelpful stimulation**

- A person with dementia becomes stressed by large amounts

of stimulation. The environment should be designed to minimise exposure to stimuli that are not helpful.

**Optimise helpful stimulation**

- Enabling the person with dementia to see, hear and smell things that give them cues about what they are and what they can do, can help to minimise their confusion and uncertainty. Cues need to be carefully designed so that they don't add to unhelpful stimulation.

**Support movement and engagement**

- Aimless wandering can be minimised by providing a well defined pathway, free of obstacles and complex decision points that guides people past points of interest and opportunities to engage in activities or social interaction.

**Create a familiar space** -

The person with dementia is more able to use and enjoy spaces and objects that were familiar to them in their early life. The environment should afford them the opportunity to maintain their competence through the use of familiar building design (internal and external), furniture, fittings and colours.

The Department of Health – Victoria's guidelines for dementia-friendly design, recommend a home-like environment. A home-like setting lets people with dementia continue the tasks of daily living, uses their existing skills and gives choice and independence. A familiar environment has recognisable features, fittings and furniture

**So what tapware should be used in a dementia-friendly environment?**

Particular attention needs to be paid to the choice of fittings when creating a dementia friendly environment. When people with dementia enter a care environment, much of their sense of dignity and privacy can get overtaken by a facility's routines and requirements. Providing bathroom fixtures and fittings which are familiar and home-like allows a facility to protect people's privacy by supporting independence for as long as possible. Easily recognisable tapware, designed using dementia-friendly design principles, allows the users to keep some independence by giving them the ability to continue with daily tasks.

For people with dementia, their strongest memories are often for things from the past. Those with dementia find it difficult to get used to unfamiliar objects. For a generation which grew up with traditional hot and cold taps, a lever or mixer tap is unfamiliar. They easily recognise and are less confused by traditional hot and cold taps with a central spout.

Tapware needs to be home-like, familiar and easily recognisable. While single lever mixers are easily recognisable to those from a younger generation, elderly dementia sufferers may struggle to identify these as taps.

Other important tapware considerations for a dementia-friendly environment, include:

- Taps and spouts should be far enough away from each other and the wall so hands are not bumped or trapped.
- Taps must have a comfortable grip and good leverage.
- Capstan head taps are preferable to taps with round and square handles.
- Hot and cold taps should have red and blue colour signs.
- A tap aid should be utilised for extra leverage for people with limited strength or manual agility.

\*Department of Health, Victoria