

Colour Contrast

tapware for a
dementia friendly
environment




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Colour & Contrast

Colour and contrast can be used by people with dementia to help identify key features and rooms. Pronounced colour contrast can be a great aid as it adds clarity to the environment, allowing people with dementia to find their way around and to use facilities and fixtures without assistance.



“Deliberate use of colour can significantly help people with dementia to recognise objects”

‘Ageing eyes’, together with dementia related ‘visuo-perceptual difficulties’ combine to cause a change in the way people with dementia see the world around them. Understanding these changes and adapting the dementia care environment can assist in reducing risks in order to support a person with dementia to live an independent life.

Due to natural thickening and yellowing of the eye with age, older people experience changes in their vision and colour perception. Common age related vision changes are:

Presbyopia

The hardening of the lens inside the eye makes it more difficult to focus on objects up close.

Decreased colour vision

The sensitivity of cells in the retina which control normal colour vision decline with age, causing colours to seem less vivid and the contrast to be less noticeable. In particular, blue colours may appear faded or “washed out.”

Decreased contrast sensitivity

A reduction in contrast perception ability makes it more difficult to differentiate between subtle changes in the environment. Seeing an object clearly on a background of the same colour becomes more

difficult stronger contrast is needed for it stand out.

Light

During the ageing process the pupil becomes smaller and less responsive to light changes as the muscles controlling the pupil weaken. This, along with the change in variable lens transparency, reduces the amount of light that an older adult eye receives. Additionally glare becomes less tolerable as the pupil is less able to adjust to varying light conditions, making it more difficult to adapt from darkness to bright light or vice versa.

Dementia related vision/perception issues

In addition people with dementia often experience difficulty with perception

so interpreting the world around them becomes problematic. Information they see is combined with memories and past knowledge and interpreted by the brain. Vision and perception difficulties combine to cause dementia related “visuo-perceptual difficulties”; such as:

- Reduced ability to detect movement
- Visual field changes
- Reduced ability to identify different colours
- Problems directing or changing gaze
- Problems recognising faces or objects
- Losing the ability to name what they are seeing
- Decreased sensitivity to differences in contrast
- Depth perception problems

A highly contrasting, coloured design facilitates perception and therefore enables people with age-related impaired vision to orientate themselves. Deliberate use of colours can significantly help people with dementia to recognise objects and move around in their environment.

How to use colour contrast to maximise well being for people living with dementia?

Prominent colour contrast can be used to visually bring objects forward and highlight elements. A white plate on a white table is difficult to see, but a red plate on a white table is much more visible - the contrast makes it easier to see & identify the plate.

Chairs should contrast with floors and sinks and toilet seats need to contrast with the toilet and wall/floor - people with dementia often have difficulties identifying the position of the toilet, leading to the mistaken belief that they are incontinent.

Likewise, a lack of contrast can be used to visually

recede objects by allowing them to blend in with their surroundings. Objects such as light switches or exit doors that the person with dementia doesn’t need to use can be camouflaged by matching them to the wall.

Clear colour contrasts can be used to ‘define’ important aspects of the environment. Floors, skirting and walls should clearly contrast with each other to allow the wall and floor junction to be easily distinguished.

Colour Contrast in Tapware

Incorporating colour contrast principles when designing tapware for people with dementia, is essential to allow for easy identification of the fixture and its function. Strong

colour indication should be combined with a product that is simple, intuitive and familiar to compensate for age related vision problems and to promote independence in self-care.

Enware’s Leva Wellbeing range incorporates easy to distinguish colour indicators that can be seen from all angles. Traditional separate hot and cold controls deliver a level of recognition the user can relate to and easily operate. The benefits of colour contrast are combined with a handle design that uses bold geometric shapes and form to optimize the user’s strength capabilities, transferring the movement to the more powerful muscles of the user’s forearm and upper arm.