



# Practical Tips to help my memory

Occupational Therapy



Occupational Therapy in NHS Lanarkshire would like to thank Alzheimer's Scotland for their support in publishing our booklet and to Elaine Hunter AHP lead at Alzheimer's Scotland for her continued encouragement in sharing our work.

If you have any comments on this booklet created by the Occupational Therapy Older Peoples Service (MH) in NHS Lanarkshire please feel free to share these via the care opinion website: [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk)



## INTRODUCTION

If you have a problem with your memory it can have an impact on your ability to do everyday tasks. Everyone is different and coping strategies will differ depending on a person's circumstances and personality. If you follow helpful habits and routines this may minimise the impact of your memory impairment.

This booklet is designed by Occupational Therapists to illustrate some practical strategies that you might find helpful. It is hoped that by using some of the techniques suggested you will be able to maintain your independence and reduce some of the frustrations memory difficulties can cause.

## USING A DIARY OR A MEMORY BOOK

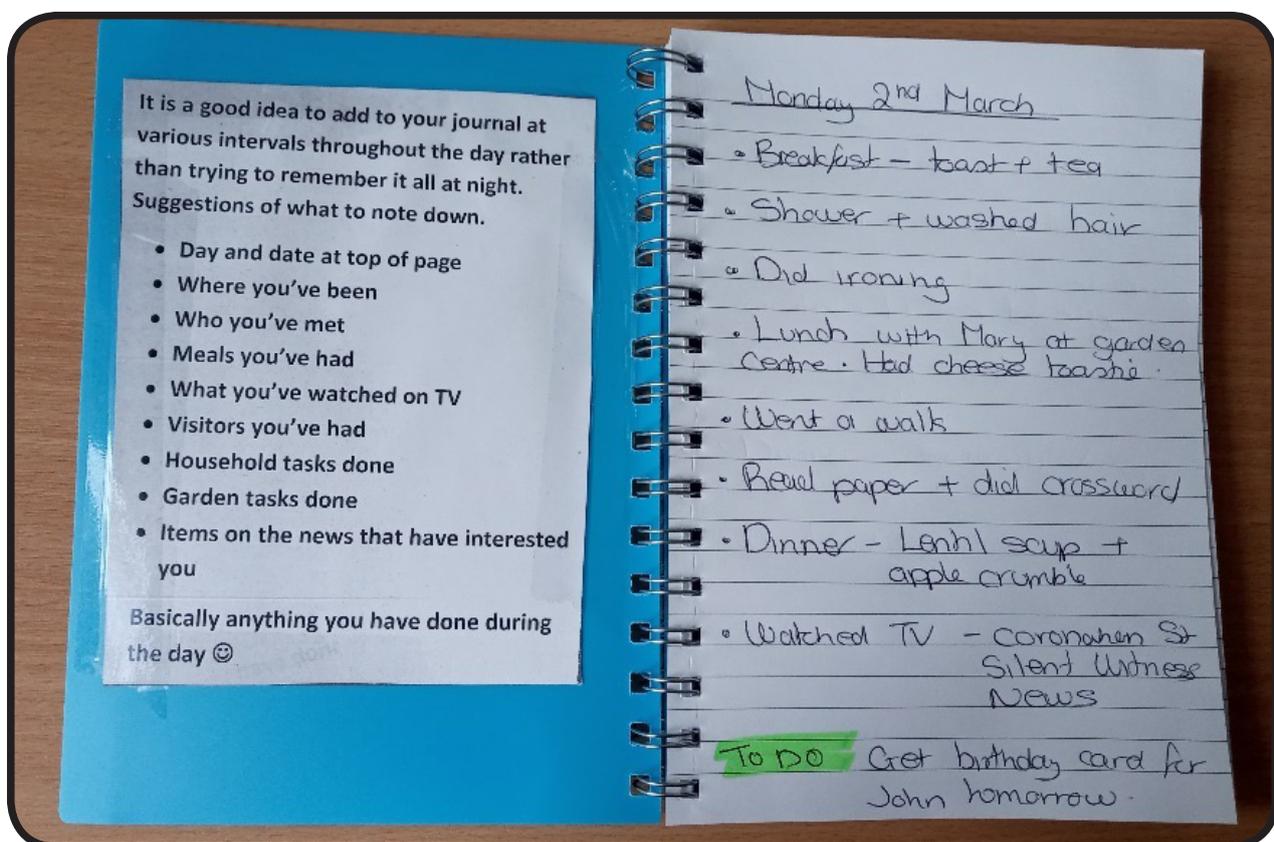
It can become more difficult to remember what you have done each day and also to distinguish one day from another.

If you keep a daily diary/journal with the day and date clearly marked it can help you to cope with this better. Writing things down that you've done throughout the day in this is a useful reminder/prompt as to what you have done each day e.g. what you had for meals, chores you have done, places you have been, people you've seen or what you've watched on TV.

It can be helpful to refer to when people phone and ask what you've been doing, to remind you when you last did housework or what you watched on TV.

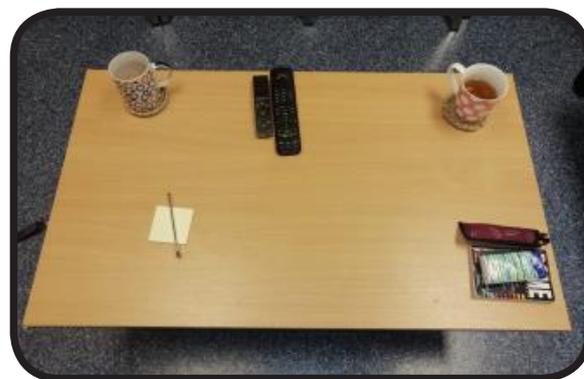
Some people find it helpful to keep a 'Things To Do' list on the page to highlight the things need to do that day or the next.

It is a good habit to read over what you have written from day to day.



## YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT

If areas are clutter free and organised it is generally easier to see what you are looking for or what you need to do, such as finding the remote control.



It is helpful if rooms have adequate light to enable you to see things clearly. Having lights on a timer ensures lights are on if you return home when it is dark and also makes it look like someone is in the house.

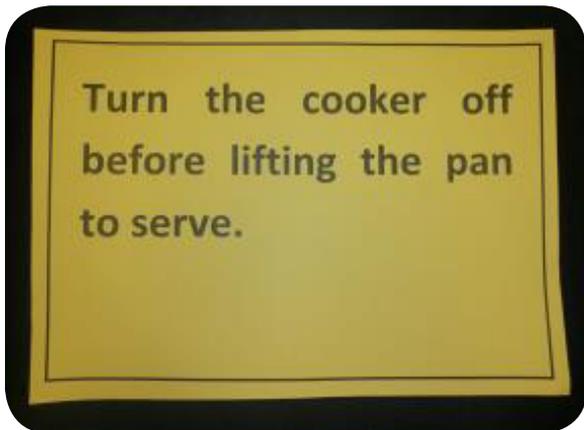


People with memory problems can have the added complication of visual difficulties, so it is often helpful if there are colour contrasts. An example of this would be dinner plates that are a different colour to the table surface.

## COOKER



It is important to be careful in the kitchen particularly when using the cooker. Prompt signs positioned in a visible place are often all that is needed to remind us to turn the cooker off.



When cooking we can become distracted and forget to turn the cooker off. It is therefore essential to get into the habit of checking the cooker is off. A prompt sign next to the cooker is a great way of developing this new habit.



You may find it helpful to have a prompt sign at the kitchen door to remind you to check the cooker is off before you leave the room.

## TIMERS



A timer can be used to remind us when the cooking time is complete. It can also remind us to check items during the cooking period.

It is easy to become distracted by the television or starting another job. This may result in the food burning. Using a timer to remind you to return to the kitchen to check the pot and give the food a stir is helpful. If you are in another room it is a good idea to take the timer with you to ensure you can hear it.

Timers can also be used as a memory prompt when doing other jobs, for example, to remind you to check the tumble dryer or to take medication.

## MEDICATION

Using a pill box is a good way of organising medications, rather than using individual packets which can be confusing.

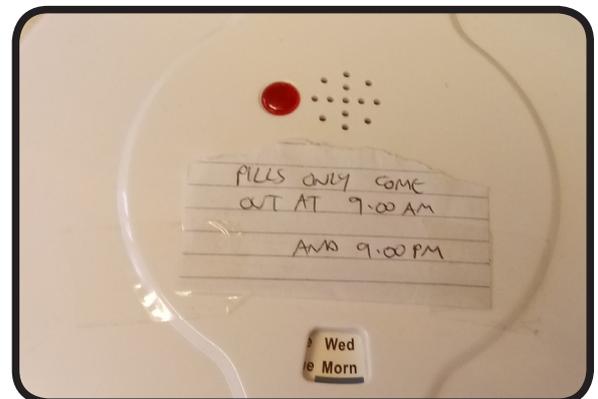
When tablets are put into a pill box, it is much easier to see whether or not they have been taken.



If you find it difficult to fill your pill box then your medications can be dispensed from the Pharmacy in a blister pack.



Some pill boxes also have a built in timer to remind you to take your medication. People of all ages use these as an effective way of taking their medication.



A prompt sign displayed in the right place to remind you to take your tablets can prove very useful, for example, beside the kettle in the morning or on your bedside table or at night.



## DAYS OF THE WEEK



For some people it is important to know what day of the week it is. This can be very frustrating if you can't remember.

There are various methods of finding out what day it is. This includes: looking at the TV, mobile phone, newspaper, TV guide, calendar, diary, clock or digital device. Some people look at the TV in the morning, while others will use a phone, clock or digital device to obtain this information.

## CALENDARS



A calendar is a visual reminder of your plans and what you need to do. It is important to refer to this on a daily basis, ideally before bed and in the morning to ensure you don't miss anything. It is also helpful towards the end of the month to check what is happening at the beginning of the following month to ensure that you are organised.



It is essential that the calendar has adequate space to write clearly, in order for it to be clearly read. In addition some people highlight important events such as birthdays and medical appointments.

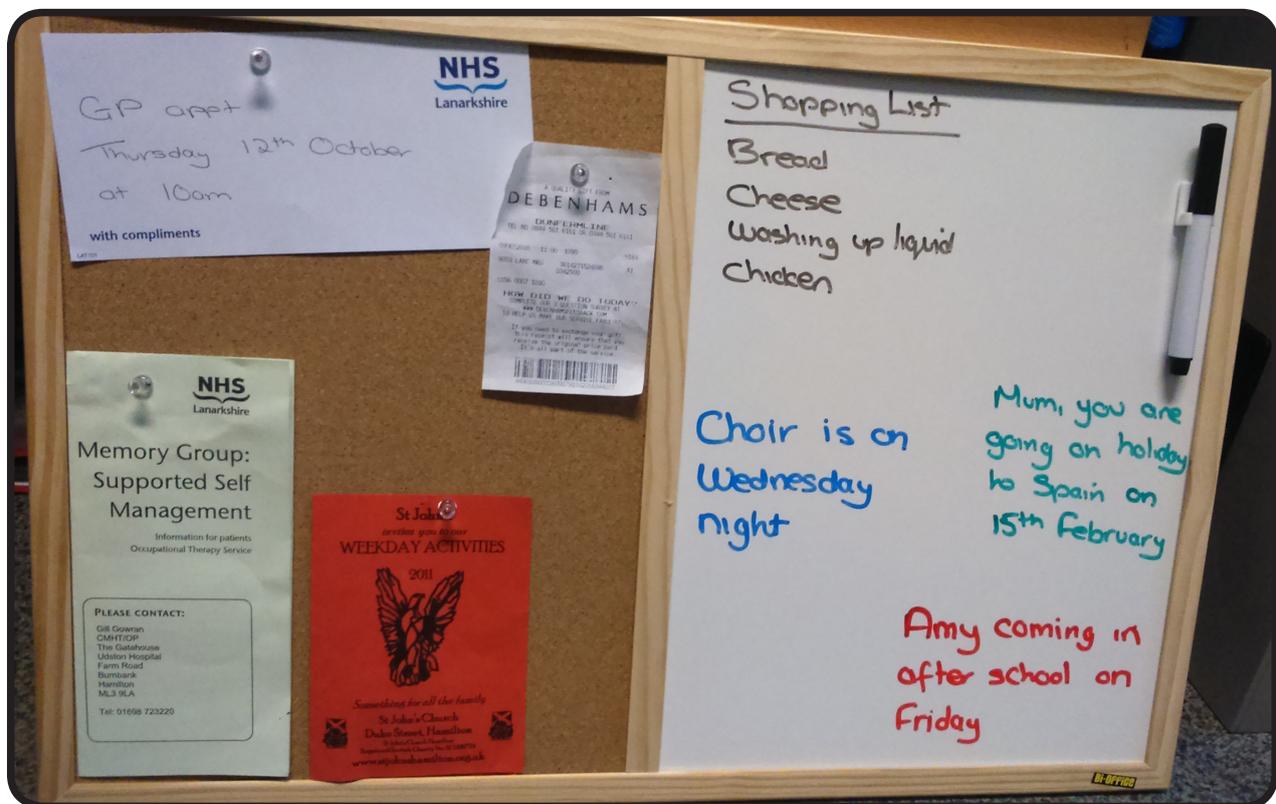
When trying to keep track of the day and date, it may be helpful to circle the date in the morning or score it off at bedtime.

## INFORMATION BOARDS

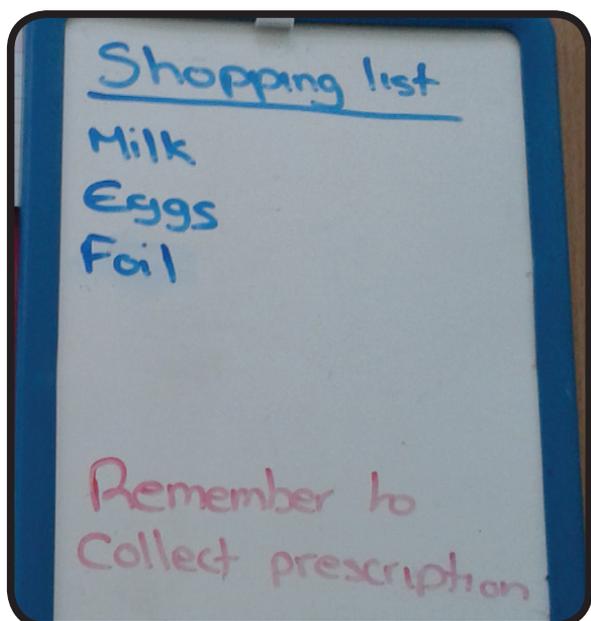
These come in various formats, such as pin boards or wipe boards. These are useful for keeping important information visible and therefore acting as a prompt.

However, it is essential that the board is not too cluttered as too much information can be confusing.

It is essential that these are regularly updated. Some people find attaching appointment letters or shopping lists to these helpful.

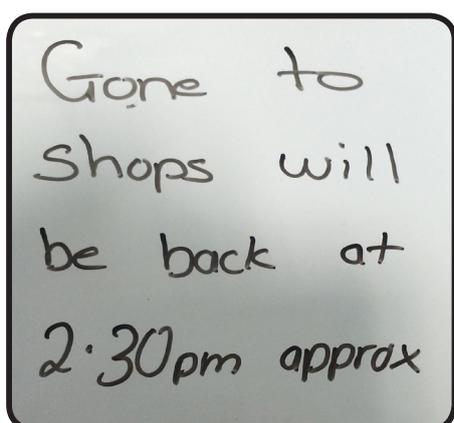


## WIPEBOARDS



These come in different sizes and can be fixed to a wall, or smaller ones can be left to be moved about to wherever they are required.

If using a larger board that has different information, it is better to use a different colour of pen for each item so they are more easily differentiated.



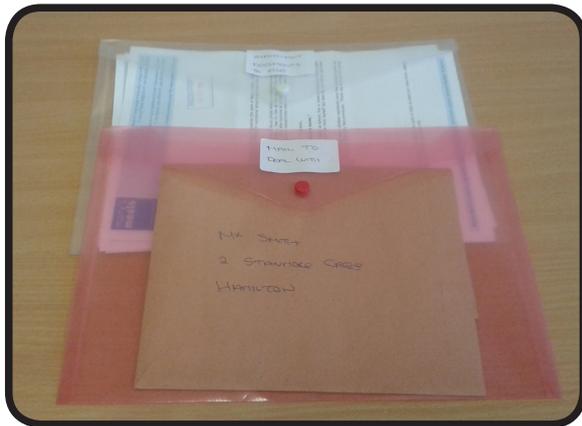
Some find this a good tool to note down what is happening in their home.



It is essential that when a task is done, or an event or outing has taken place, that this is removed from the board. Where possible the person with memory difficulties should be encouraged to do this themselves, so it becomes a habit and part of their normal routine.

## MANAGING CORRESPONDENCE

It is so important to have a system for organising correspondence to ensure that bills are paid, appointments are attended and so you can find documents that you need.



A clearly labelled plastic wallet will allow you to store documents and letters so that you can find them at a later date.

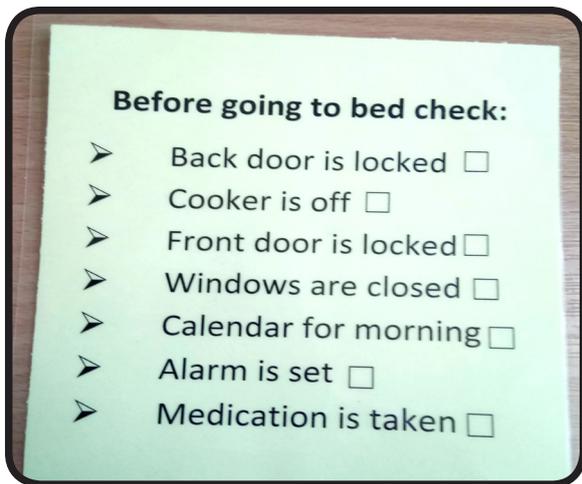


You could use different coloured wallets to help organise information, such as household bills or medical appointment.

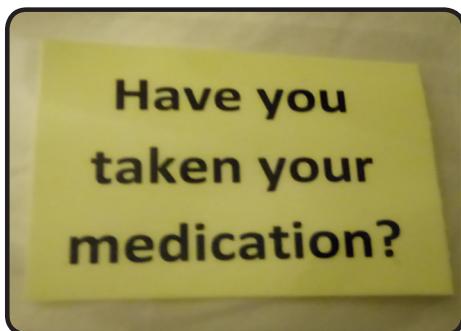
## NIGHTTIME



To help with orientation, keeping a light on during the night in the hallway or in the bathroom can be helpful; or you might prefer a nightlight with a soft glow.



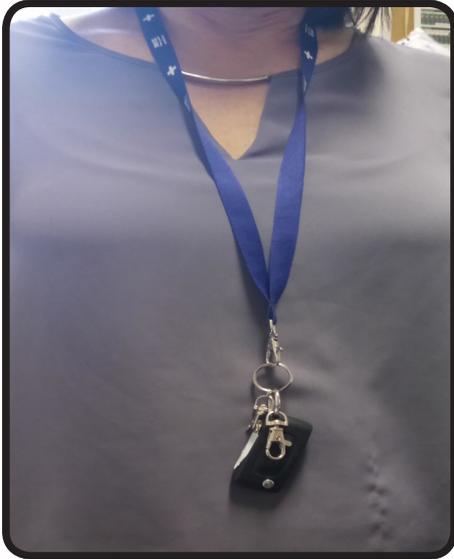
To ensure your home is secure before going to bed, try and use a checklist to tick off tasks that you have done.



If you take medication at night you may find using a prompt sign helpful.

If you place the sign on your pillow every morning when you make your bed it will be visible when you go to bed and can be placed on your bedside table until the morning.

## KEYS



Misplacing keys is a common problem. It is important to have a safe place to keep them and get into the habit of returning them there. Do not leave your key in the lock as it prevents access in an emergency.



Some people find keeping keys on a hook helpful while others prefer a specific drawer or dish.

You can also get digital key finders to attach to your keys to allow you to locate them if lost. These are readily available from various supplies.

Locating keys when out can be challenging but if they are attached to your bag or person they are much easier to locate.

## REMEMBERING ITEMS WHEN GOING OUT



If you need to remember to take something with you, make sure it is visible and accessible.

Placing a bag on the door handle and not on the floor may be an effective strategy.



Putting a note on the door is also helpful if you need to remember to do something before leaving the house, such as remember to take tickets and passports or turn the heater off.

## TECHNOLOGY

There are many different devices available which can help us to live fulfilling and productive lives, for example, being able to access music we enjoy or staying in touch with family and friends by text message, email or video calling.



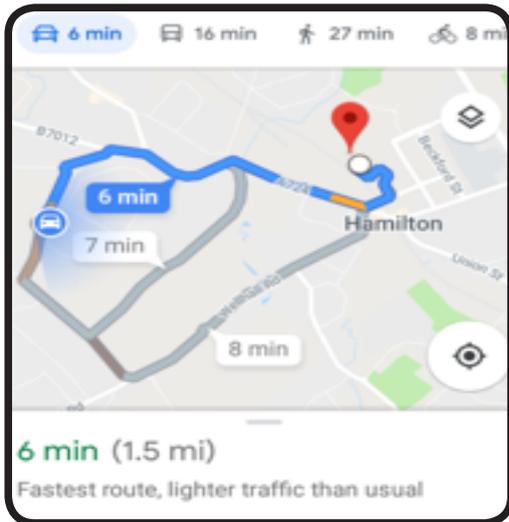
These devices can help to compensate for or minimise the difficulties memory problems can cause.

For example: Daily/weekly/monthly reminders can be set on mobile devices and virtual assistants.

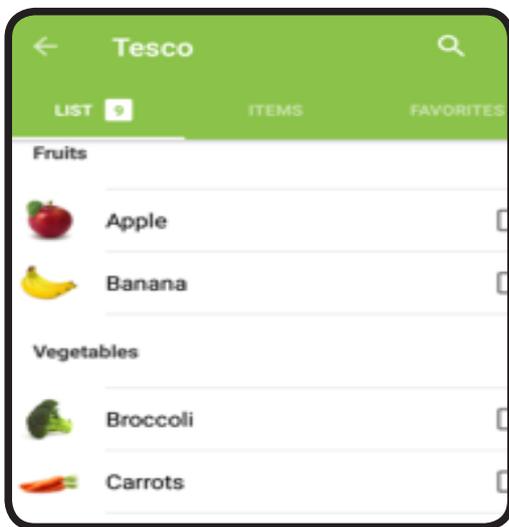


The calendar function on these devices can be useful to keep you orientated to the day/date and to help you keep track of appointments and upcoming events

Taking photographs on your mobile phone can be a great way of keeping a record of a day out, but can also serve as a helpful reminder of where the car is parked in a large car park.

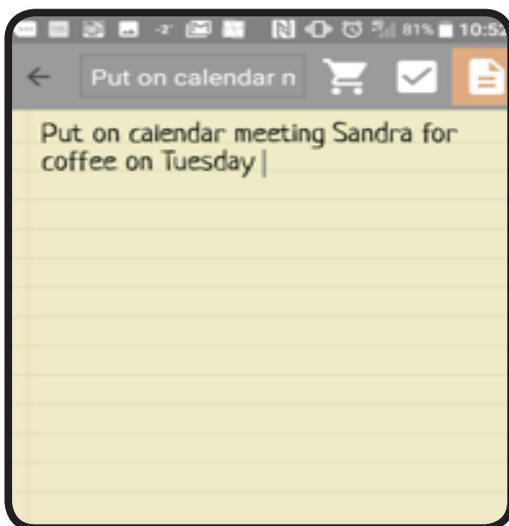


Many devices have the option of route planners/maps to assist with orientation. However there are also devices which can be used as a GPS tracker, which would enable the person with the device to be located. Some people find this reassuring so they can be easily found if necessary.



Helpful apps can be added for example a torch or shopping list.

Use the timer function to remind you to do something such as empty the tumble dryer or check the cooker.



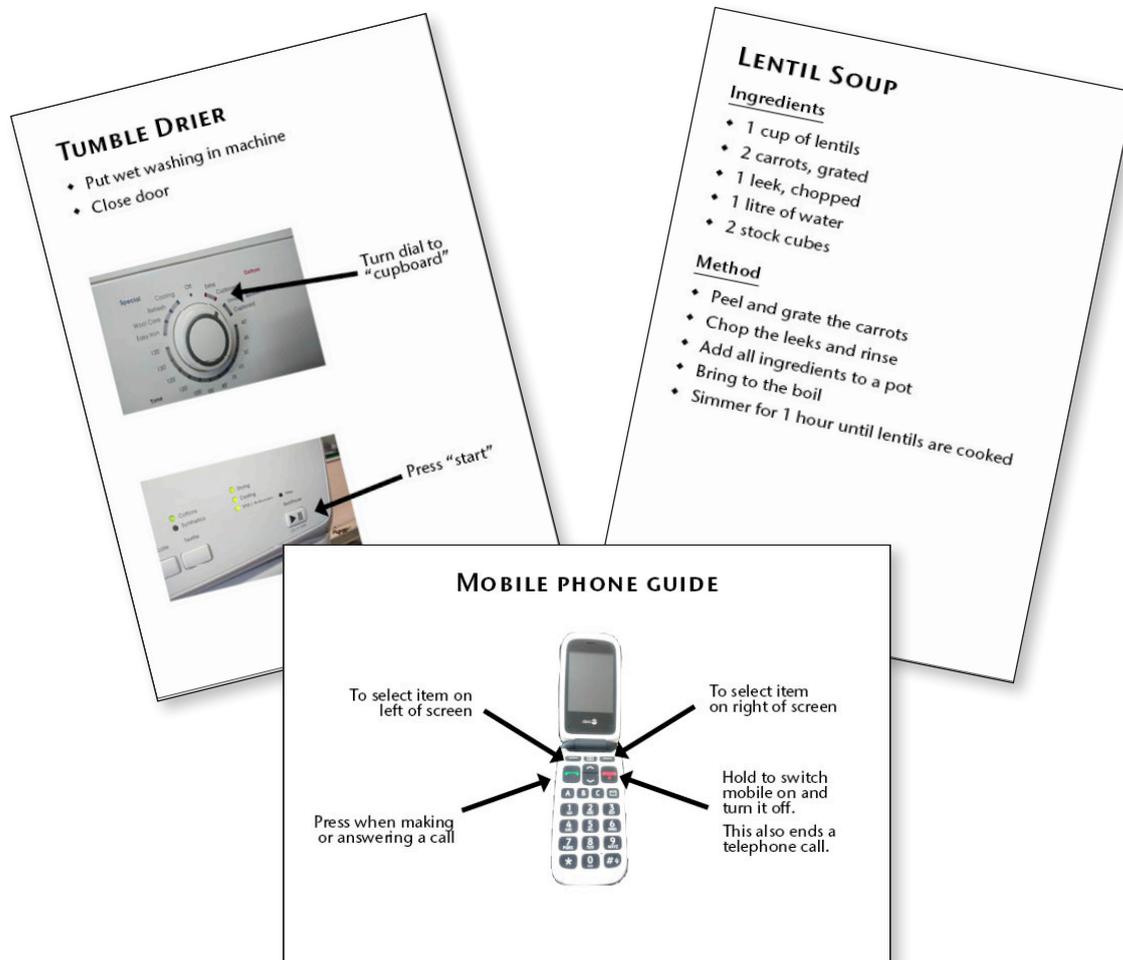
Use a Notepad app for general reminders.

## INSTRUCTION GUIDES

Many people find using an unfamiliar appliance, or a new piece of technology challenging. It can be helpful to write down step by step instructions in your own words. If family are helping you to do this, it is essential they use your words for each step so it is easier for you to understand.

Using picture guides can make written instructions easier to understand. If using this method it is important to use a picture of the actual item that is being used and not something similar as this can be confusing. This can be simply done by taking a photo of the item and labelling the various relevant parts accordingly.

Similarly, having recipes written in a simple step by step guide, can assist you to continue to successfully prepare these dishes.



## ADOPTING NEW STRATEGIES

It is important to acknowledge that if you are changing the way you do something it will not happen immediately. Time and practice must be given for new habits and routines to be established. It is also helpful if only one new strategy is initiated at a time to give it the opportunity to be adopted.

### **What if I still have concerns after trying to make changes?**

If you continue to have concerns about your memory and ability to do familiar tasks you should consider consulting your GP to enquire if further investigation is required.

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Pub. date:	Oct 2020
Review date:	Oct 2022
Issue No:	04
Department:	Occ Therapy