



Dementia Friendly Grocery Stores



Grocery stores and food retailers play a vital role in supporting people living with dementia to remain independent, and stay connected to their communities—and to continue shopping, making choices and following familiar routines. This sector includes supermarkets, local and independent grocery stores, food cooperatives, specialty markets, warehouse and discount retailers, and convenience stores that offer grocery items.

This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions for grocery store staff—including managers, supervisors, cashiers, customer service staff and department employees such as produce, deli, bakery and pharmacy—to create more accessible, supportive and welcoming shopping experiences for customers living with dementia and their care partners.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a term used to describe a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, communication and decision-making that are serious enough to affect daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In grocery settings, dementia may make it harder to locate items, follow store layouts or complete checkout processes. Busy environments, noise and multiple steps in shopping can increase confusion or stress.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for all staff through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops. Integrate this awareness into employee onboarding, ongoing training and daily customer service practices.

Help staff understand how dementia may affect the shopping experience by sharing practical examples, such as difficulty finding items, following store signage, managing a shopping list or completing checkout.

Prepare staff to recognize common situations—such as a customer appearing lost, asking repeated questions or having difficulty completing a transaction—and to respond with calm, supportive assistance.

Support employees who are providing care to someone with dementia by offering flexible scheduling, access to employee assistance programs or referrals to resources like the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer's Association Helpline.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. Make eye contact, face the person directly and use a friendly greeting so they know you are speaking to them.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time.

Use a warm, calm and respectful tone of voice. Friendly expressions and reassurance help customers feel safe and supported.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices, such as yes/no options or “Would you like a bag or no bag?”

Give the person extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently—avoid rushing or finishing sentences.

Repeat or rephrase information if something is not understood. Use simple words or shorter phrases to support understanding.

Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Watch for signs of confusion, stress or frustration and respond calmly and supportively.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Provide large-print, high-contrast signs throughout the store. Use simple words and familiar icons (e.g., produce, dairy, restrooms, checkout, customer service) placed at eye level to help customers navigate.

Keep store layouts consistent and easy to follow. Avoid frequently moving common items and maintain clear aisle organization. Clearly mark key areas such as restrooms, service counters, pharmacy and exits.

Keep pathways wide, clear and uncluttered. Avoid overcrowded displays, floor stacks or promotional items that may block aisles or create confusion.

Reduce noise and sensory distractions. Lower background music and limit unnecessary announcements when possible.

Use bright, even lighting throughout the store. Reduce glare, shadows and overly reflective surfaces to help customers see clearly.

Provide comfortable seating areas where customers can rest if needed. Place seating near entrances, checkout areas or customer service desks.

Make checkout areas easy to understand and navigate. Ensure traditional staffed checkout lanes are available and clearly marked. Provide assistance at self-checkout and simplify on-screen prompts where possible.

Keep floors safe and easy to navigate. Avoid shiny or highly patterned flooring that may cause confusion or misperception. Clean spills promptly and clearly mark hazards.

Make staff easy to identify. Use uniforms, aprons or large name badges so customers can quickly find help when needed.

CREATE A SUPPORTIVE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

Offer assistance when needed. If a customer appears lost or unsure, approach calmly and offer to help.

Walk with customers to find items rather than giving directions. Provide help locating products or reading labels when needed.

Check in during the shopping experience. If a customer appears uncertain or returns to the same area, offer reassurance and guidance.

Support customers during checkout. Allow extra time for payment and offer help with card readers or PIN entry if requested.

Explain steps during checkout. Provide simple, step-by-step guidance to help customers complete transactions successfully.

Assist customers who need additional support. Guide them to customer service or help connect them with a care partner if needed.

Offer quieter shopping times when possible. Lower music, limit announcements and reduce unnecessary noise to create a calmer shopping environment.

Offer additional supports when possible. Provide options such as assisted shopping services or clearly marked help points.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer's Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



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