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# LIVING TABLE

The table is central to life, community and conviviality. It is a surface that empowers its users to interact and engage with others. It is also suitable for activities like handicrafts and home gardening. Welcome to life around the table.





Eating together is no small thing. For much of human history, the sharing of meals is what has kept social groups together—a symbolic moment of familiarity and collective care. The circle of the campfire meal is perhaps that ritual that most preserves humanity. In many cultures, even now, the family meal is the one sacred (and jealously preserved) moment. *No matter what else happens, we eat dinner together.* This is even encoded in our language: in English, at least, to “break bread” with someone carries the meaning of friendship, cooperation, and camaraderie.

As dementia progresses in severity, however, the challenge of eating together grows dramatically—and as a result, many of our Alberts and Lucys tend to dine by

themselves, in the company of a dedicated carer. This is not intended as a gesture of exclusion; rather, the effects of cognitive impairment (and the challenges of feeding) make shared meals sometimes impractical or uncomfortable. For small families and couples, assisting a loved one in eating means that one must eat, oneself, later.

However, maintaining shared meals—and the warm conviviality that this embodies—is a crucial task. Firstly, this reduces a sense of isolation. Even within a small space, it is possible to lead separate lives; the dining table is the one place where we can confirm all as members of the family unit. Medical evidence has shown repeatedly the negative effects of isolation on dementia severity: decline increases dramatically when one spends excessive time alone, and without being

engaged in conversation<sup>1</sup>.

A second factor is the interaction that takes place during the meal itself. When we eat, we talk. This means that dinner is the perfect opportunity to re-engage all of our loved ones in simple interactions, which challenge the mind and work against the progress of cognitive decline.

This means that eating together is one of the “normative” rituals that we must work hardest to save. But how?

Often, the pressure to eat separately arises from simple pragmatic concerns: portioning, serving, ensuring against choking (or attempts to eat non-edible items). Tabling a meal is one of the most complicated domestic tasks, and is made significantly harder by the added hurdles of dementia. As a result, a major area of “life-hacking” lies in the clever tweaking of meal service to alleviate some of these complexities. Segmented plates, for instance, may help in the portioning process—and in picking up food with greater ease. Smaller spoons help to reduce “shoveling” of stews or rice, reducing somewhat the risk of choking. Likewise, smaller cups make swallowing of liquids easier. Removing

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6097646/>



small convenience-items, such as chopstick rests, can bring a measure of relief if we are concerned that these might be mistaken for food.

Likewise, we might take advantage of the relatively inexpensive pricing of items at Ikea (or even Daiso) to anticipate the loss or wear of familiar items, and to make sure that we have many of these on hand. For example, a ready supply of a familiar cup or bowl (purchased in bulk) can help to preserve the comfort of familiar objects, even in the event of occasional breakage. The same is true for napkins and place-mats, which can bear the brunt of repeated use and staining.

We can also think more flexibly about how meals take place. Even if feeding our loved ones takes far longer than a typical meal-time, we can follow dining with activities—homework, web-browsing, reading—that also take place at the table. This extends the conviviality of the meal beyond the act of eating, meaning that companionship can occur even if the timing of meals becomes awkward.

This implies, also, that we can re-think the role and use of the dining table in order to spend more time together.



Tables that are mono-functional—that is, just for eating—will tend to encourage dining in shifts, and more isolation of those with dementia. However, if this surface becomes a multi-functional hub, more time will be spent together, and the spirit of conviviality and companionship can be preserved.

Likewise, the simple position of the table is also a powerful factor. If we position it close to a favorite chair, we will find it much easier to preserve casual, frequent interactions over the course of the day. Even if co-dining is not possible, we can preserve adjacency—meaning that multiple family members can still sit together. This is far less likely if “that chair” and the dining table are at opposite ends of the room, either by choice or by habit. This suggests that dementia may invite a re-thinking of the way we furnish our rooms: moving away from discrete functional clusters and toward more multi-programmatic conglomerations of different

furniture pieces. There is a natural tendency to “normalise” by preserving old (pre-dementia) arrangements; however, such good intentions can work against us as our families enter a new era of care.

The challenge of meals can be seen as a headache—or as an opportunity to re-think life in a new mode. We can begin to experiment with rearrangements, both of furniture and activities, to ensure that being together is a central priority of family life with dementia. We can re-position the dining table, potentially, as a lively centre of family activity, making it easier (and more pleasant) to be with, and watch over, our loved ones. After all, care for every family member was the origin of this practice in our earliest days as a species: the meal, the remnant of that old sheltering fire, remains a way to keep all together, and everyone safe.







## Life begins here

Family life often revolves around the dining table. Common family bonding rituals like meals and conversations promote interaction and inclusion. When the care recipient starts finding it difficult to move to the dining table, why not move it to him? That way, the care recipient reaps the benefits of being included in family interaction.

**Meals are always a way to bring a smile to faces. The smell of delicious food, the taste of rich flavours, and the sound of joy and laughter all have a way of improving how we feel.**



# YOUR OWN MOBILE TABLE



01 ÖVRARYD Tabletop  
02 KRILLE Leg with castor X 2  
03 ADILS Leg X 2  
04 BJÄRRED Drawer handle

## Living table benefits

This versatile table adapts to various scenarios and setups. During mealtimes, it can be wheeled to Albert or Lucy wherever they are seated. At other times, it can be parked on the side for other uses.



**1** Move where needed

**2** Hang convenient items

**3** Wipe fidgety fingers

**4** Contain your spills



# The table makes Albert happy

Beyond social interaction, the table offers a work surface for life-affirming rituals and therapeutic activities. Tidying, gardening, or even the simple act of resting one's elbows against the table allows for moments of personal joy.



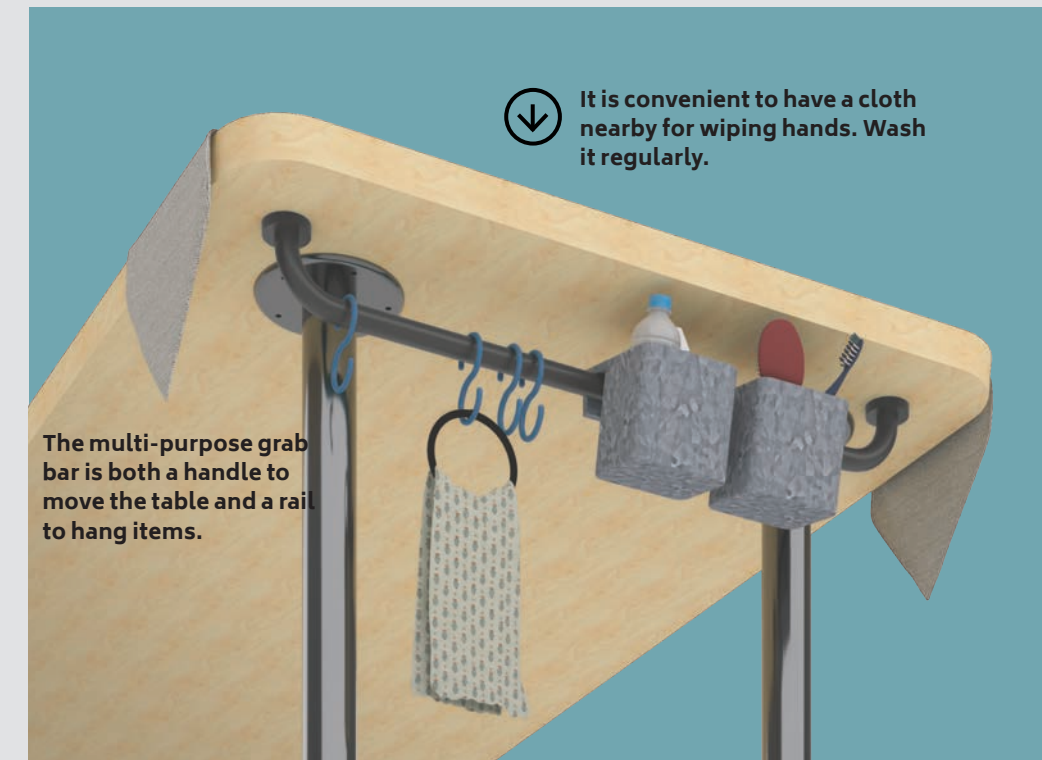
Potted plants — and the act of caring for them at the table — offer a relationship with nature that engenders psychological well-being.

There is something comforting to the ritual of tidying — redirecting jittery energy toward a productive and meaningful activity. Give the care recipient simple tasks as a form of work therapy, to spark a sense of achievement in them.



The table offers simple joys like a convenient surface to lean one's elbow in a pose that invites a relaxed state of being.

## For your added convenience.



**SUNNERSTA container** From IKEA.

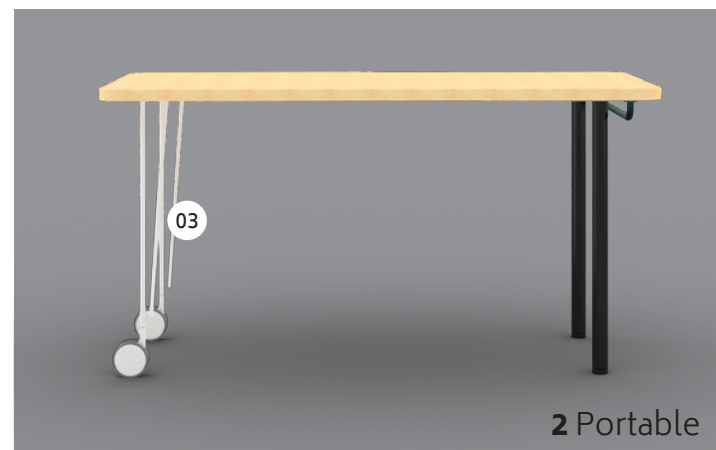
### Elastic table sock

If Albert's fidgeting dislodges the cloth cover often, consider trimming and sewing in a length of elastic to make a table sock.



IKEA's range of kitchen hooks works well with the grab bar. Hang rags, clothes, or anything Albert might need.





Move the living table wherever and whenever it's needed. It's versatile for multiple uses.

**01 RYDEBÄCK** Plastic surfaces are easy to wipe.  
**02 OLOV height-adjustable legs** A lower tabletop matches the POÄNG's seat height for Albert's comfort.  
**03 ÖVRARYD/KRILLE tabletop with castor legs** The classic Living Table combination: affordable and adaptable.  
**04 SLÄHULT** Rounded corners keep Albert safe.

No more corner bumps! Round tables remove dangerous corners that are easy to bump into.



# The wonderful world of tables



Mobile butcher-blocks or kitchen island carts are at an appropriate height for carers. Supplement your ALGOT with these for an attractive, flexible and space-saving worktop.



Many households already have small folding tables. Consider tucking one of these at the Carer's Corner behind the POÄNG, so that it's ready and available for use anytime.



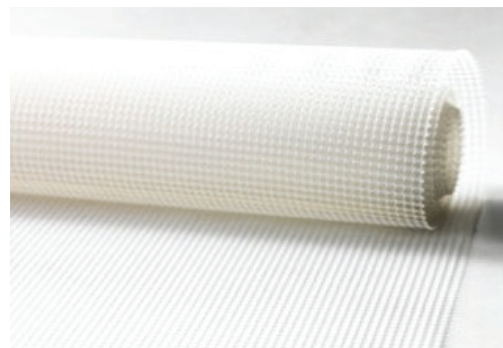
# Living life, one tray at a time

Trays are a way to organise life and change the scene. They offer practical benefits like containing mess and spills. Organise items into stackable trays based on different activities at the table, like gardening, painting, music. The possibilities for in-seat entertainment are endless.



## Spill no more

Serve food and beverages in trays to keep mealtimes neat, tidy and easy to clear.



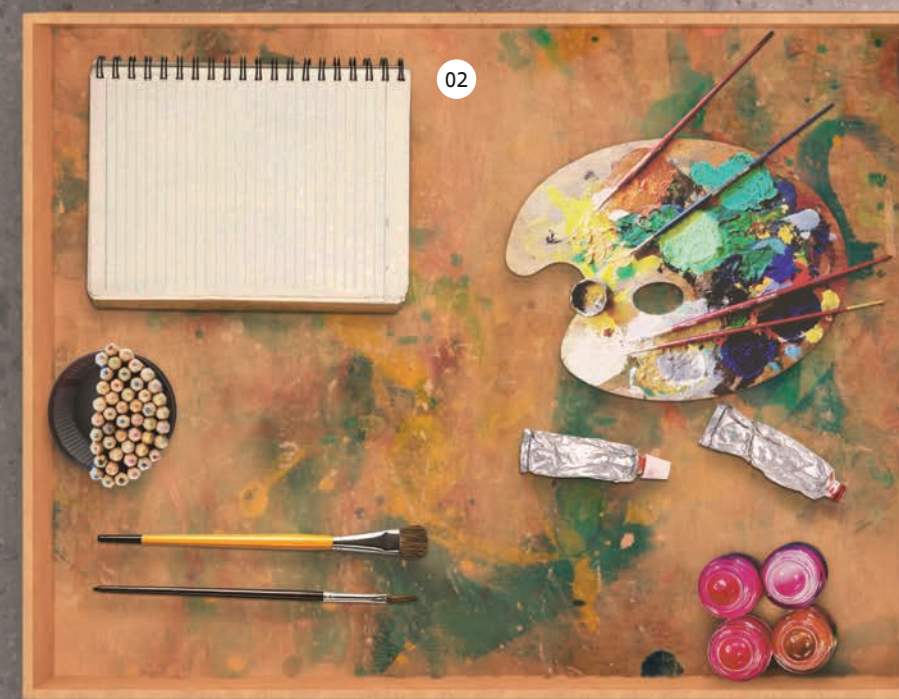
## Silicone safe-grab mat

Consider applying a silicone mat on bases to prevent items on the tray from slipping.



## Rims and edges

Tray tables with rimmed edges are a good way to contain spills.



Sort items into separate trays based on respective themes and activities.

- 01 Gardening tray
- 02 Art tray
- 03 Entertainment tray



# Community around a table

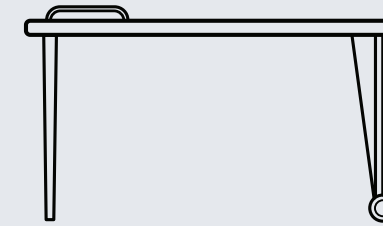
Interaction and intimacy make a huge difference. The immediate presence of friends and family offer warmth to the care recipient. Family members can let their everyday interaction and bonding activities take place around the persons with dementia, enlivening the space around them.



How about sharing the table with grandchildren doing their homework?



**EVEN  
MORE  
MOBILE**



**LIVING TABLE**  
Mobile table that integrates  
with POÄNG and ALGOT

For assembly instructions, see  
[www.hackcare.sg](http://www.hackcare.sg)



Bonding rituals like the preparation of Chinese New Year goodies often revolve around the dining table. Let the care recipient join in on the fun!



Living tables come in  
all legs and sizes.



There's a table for every occasion,  
and a hack for any table.

Hack your table, hack care.