

Activities of Daily Living

Activities

This factsheet provides information to support families to help a person with dementia to continue to enjoy activities. Activities are important as they help define us, enhance our self-esteem and give purpose to our lives.

Carefully selected activities can provide stimulation and variety within a safe environment and help people with dementia feel more confident. Try to make sure that:

- Activities chosen are those where the person will not worry about failing or being judged by their performance.
- You give encouragement and praise. In the early stages, the person with dementia may be able to think of activities to keep themselves occupied. As dementia progresses it can affect a person's initiative to begin a task and so they may need gentle prompts and encouragement to take part in activities.

How activities can help

- Activities can help people maintain skills and give a sense of achievement.
- Activities can provide interest or fun and help the person feel better about themselves and be more alert and interested in what is going on around them.
- Some activities such as painting a picture or looking at old photographs may help people with dementia express their feelings, so be sensitive to their reactions.
- Activities can relieve boredom and frustration and help a person to sleep well at night.
- Sharing an enjoyable activity may help you find new ways to relate to the person with dementia and bring you closer.

Tips to remember

- Simple activities are often the best, particularly as dementia progresses. Look for those which provide stimulation, but avoid too many challenges or choices as these can be bewildering.
- People with dementia often retain their sense of humour. Look for opportunities for to share a good laugh.
- The person with dementia may find it hard to concentrate for any length of time so activities that can be enjoyed for short periods are often more satisfactory.
- In the later stages of dementia you may need to think about brief activities that break up the day and provide contact with the person, such as a hand massage or listening to music. For more information about activities in the later stages call 1800 341 341

Suggestions for activities

Some people may be able to continue with activities they previously enjoyed, such as playing the piano, reading, carpentry or sewing, for quite some time and need only a little prompting to do so. Others may find their previous activities too demanding or become upset because they can no longer carry them out to the same standard. You will need to be ready to adapt and simplify activities



Some suggestions for activities include:

Exercise

A walk in the fresh air each day, if possible, is enjoyable as well a good form of exercise. Exercising to music is another good way of keeping fit and often helps to improve people's mood. It's good for you both to get out and about.

Alternatively, if you both like dancing, clear a space and try dancing to some favourite tunes. The person may well remember the steps and be delighted to have retained this ability. If not, you can improvise.

Games such as playing with a ball or balloon can provide exercise and fun if approached in a lighthearted way.

Music

Listening to music can remain a pleasure for a long time. You might record some favourite pieces for the person to listen to while you are not there. Popular songs from the person's younger days are often appreciated. They may like to sing along with the words or you may like to sing together.

Out and about

A walk in the park with a cup of tea in a café, a visit to a garden centre or to a local museum, for example, can provide contact with other people as well as a change of scene and a focal point for conversation.

Pets

Many people with dementia respond well to pets, particularly if they had a pet earlier in their lives. Cats and dogs they can stroke are especially suitable. If you do not have a pet you might encourage a neighbour or friend to bring one in from time to time.

Television

Television can become increasingly confusing as dementia progresses. Avoid just turning on the television. Select favourite programmes and check the person is still enjoying them. Musicals and movies from a person's earlier life may be enjoyed for longer.

Reminiscence therapy/ Reminders of the past

People with dementia usually find it easier to remember events that happened when they were younger rather than the more recent past. You may find they become more lively and interested if you can find ways to trigger early memories. These might include:

- Looking through old photographs or mementos of their life, such as birth and marriage certificates, medals or awards, old invitations or postcards.
- Clothes, shoes or bags that have been kept for many years can spark off memories as can treasured possessions or a 'rummage box' items from a person's past that have meaning for them. All the family can help to create a rummage box.
- Looking at pictures in books about subjects that are of particular interest such as old cars, former film stars or places they have visited. You can borrow books from your local library.

Sensory stimulation

As dementia progresses and verbal communication becomes more difficult, activities which involve the senses become even more important.

- Touching or stroking soft pieces of fabric or a cuddly toy can often give comfort. A gentle hand massage can give reassuring contact.
- Tasting flavours enjoyed in the past such as old fashioned sweets or distinctive foods or drinks can bring back memories.
- Smelling flowers or perfume or distinctive smells such as ground coffee or fresh bread can give pleasure.
- Listening to different kinds of music can be relaxing or stimulating, depending on the choice.
- In the later stages of dementia, a pleasant view, a hanging mobile or a goldfish tank can provide a focus of interest and be calming.

For more information and suggestions or to talk to someone about activities you can call **1800 341 341**.