

Activities of Daily Living & Other Problems

Activities

If you can help the person with dementia to find activities that they still enjoy you will improve their quality of life as well as your own. You will need to be imaginative and flexible in adapting activities to their changing capabilities as well as to their different moods.



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 but as it progresses, this may become more difficult and they will need more frequent prompting and assistance.

How activities can help

- Activities can help people maintain their skills and give them 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.

Advantages for the carer

Some of the behaviour that carers find difficult may be due to boredom or frustration. Such behaviour sometimes lessens or even vanishes if the person is pleasantly occupied.

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 find you have to work quite hard with the person in order to get a response. Think in terms of brief activities that will help break up the day and give you contact with the person, such as hand massage or listening together to some music.

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 or find new ones that they can enjoy.

Other carers may be able to suggest suitable activities including games such as dominoes, skittles or snap, or creative activities such as painting, knitting or modelling with dough.

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. If they do enjoy watching television, try to select some favourite programmes they can still follow rather than just having it on all day.

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' containing articles such as an old powder compact, cuff links or sea shells.
- 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.