

## **Meaningful Activity**

*“Activity’s purpose is not to kill time, but to make time live,  
not to keep a person occupied, but to keep him refreshed,  
not to offer an escape from life, but to provide a discovery of  
life.”*

*- Anonymous*

# When planning activities, consider...

## Your Approach

How you go about organizing and implementing the activity can influence how successful the session will be. Make sure you understand the needs of the person with dementia. Keep in mind what activities and methods were used in the past to make the activity successful.

### 1. Make it Simple

Break activities into manageable steps. Giving too many instructions at one time may overwhelm the person. Focusing on one task at a time, giving clear and simple directions and giving those directions step-by-step may increase their success with the activity.



### 2. Maintain familiar routines as much as possible

Understand the person's daily routine. If an individual is active in the morning, plan activities for the morning. Likewise, if a person is active in the afternoon, plan activities for the afternoon. For example, if the person enjoys reading the paper with breakfast, let them continue even if the words do not make sense anymore.

### 3. Begin the activity where the person can succeed

Some people with dementia struggle to follow directions, therefore, starting an activity and having them join in at a point where they understand will increase their level of comfort and success. For example, if you are cooking and the person is unable to follow the written measurement, give them the proper measuring cup to fill.



### 4. Organizing material and equipment in advance

Prepare and gather all material necessary for the activity and have things ready before beginning the activity. This will make it easier to stay on task. For example, if you are playing a game, place everything needed for the game on the table before you ask the person to come and play.

### 5. Add a stimulus to an existing behavior



If the person taps their feet or fingers repeatedly, add some music for the person to tap along to.

## 6. Encourage self-expression



Include activities that allow the person a chance to express him or herself. These types of activities could include painting, drawing, music, conversation or reminiscing.

## 7. Do not criticize or correct the person

If the person is participating in a harmless activity that they are enjoying, do not interrupt them; let them continue.



## 8. Try again later

If the person is not enjoying the activity, it may be the wrong time of day or the activity may not be right for that person. Try again or adapt the activity to better suit their needs. Keeping a journal will help you keep track of what works and what doesn't.

# The Environment

The space or environment you have arranged may have an influence on its success. Below are some things to keep in mind when preparing and implementing an activity.

### 1. Make activities safe

Remove unsafe material from the environment, such as furniture or floor coverings that can be tripped over or supplies that are not necessary for the activity

### 2. Change your surroundings to encourage activities

Leave out photo albums, scrapbooks and old magazines that encourage reminiscing. Puzzles, games and flowers or plants can be left out to encourage spontaneous cognitive stimulation

### 3. Minimize distractions

The person with dementia may be more successful with activities if they are in an environment free of distraction. Turning off the radio or television can minimize the distractions.



# The Activity

Activities for people with dementia are very important. Activities allow the person to express themselves through different means. They fulfil the need for cognitive, social, physical and emotional stimulation. Activities also provide the person with a sense of accomplishment and a sense that they can contribute. Remember to adjust the activities as the disease progresses.

## 1. Make activities part of the daily routine

Ask the person to help you to complete a routine task like folding towels, washing dishes, dusting or cleaning. This can provide them with a sense of importance and purpose. The time of day which an activity is done could affect the success of the activity. Choose the time of day that will be the most consistent with the persons past patterns or habits.

## 2. Focus on enjoyment

Find activities that build on remaining skills and talents. For example, a person that used to knit may not have the ability to knit a sweater but, may enjoy winding a ball of yarn. Let the person with dementia do things in their own way. Rules and guidelines of the “right way” to do things are not necessary. Keep an open mind, if they are enjoying the activity, let them continue the way they want to – provided it does not place the person or others at risk.

## 3. Adapt activities as needed

Be ready to adapt the activity as needed. Examples of adaptations include changing rules of the game, replacing small print with large print. If a person is not able to play bridge anymore, play a simpler card game or if the person can't follow the numbers for BINGO, play picture BINGO instead.



# The Person

Planning activities for a person with dementia involves continual exploration, experimentations and adaptation. Consider the person's likes and dislikes, strengths and abilities and past interests. As the disease progresses, keep activities flexible and prepare to make adjustments.

## 1. What does the person enjoy doing?

When choosing activities, consider what past activities the person has enjoyed. Habitual skills, long term memory – skills we learned early in life are the ones we retain the longest. Build on those activities and modify them as needed.

## 2. What skills and abilities does the person have?

Be aware of the person's current level of functioning, as well as past skills and abilities. Pay attention to how the person's abilities are changing as the disease progresses. Always encourage, support and build on skills and abilities and remember to allow the person to do as much as they can independently. Gross motor skills are retained longer – bigger muscle movements like walking and dancing.

## 3. What activities does the person begin without direction?

Does the person automatically clear the table after dinner, or begin dusting in the afternoon? If so, encourage the person to continue that routine. Include the person in other daily chores that they would do regularly. When this is no longer possible, initiate an activity with the person watching – to provide a visual clue – they may not understand the words you are saying. Hearing vs Understanding.

## 4. Does the person have any physical limitations?

People with dementia may lose some physical abilities. If the person has a short attention span, keep the activities short. Likewise, if the person tires easily, make the length of an exercise program short.



# Things to do with the person with dementia

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Clip Coupons</li><li>2. Sort Poker Chips</li><li>3. Count Tickets</li><li>4. Rake leaves</li><li>5. Use the carpet sweeper</li><li>6. Read out loud</li><li>7. Bake cookies</li><li>8. Look up names in the phone book</li><li>9. Read the newspaper aloud</li><li>10. Listen to polka music</li><li>11. Plant seeds indoors or outside</li><li>12. Look at photographs</li><li>13. Toss a ball</li><li>14. Colour pictures</li><li>15. Make lemonade</li><li>16. Wipe off the table</li><li>17. Weed the flowers</li><li>18. Shell peanuts</li><li>19. Read the Readers Digest</li><li>20. Fold clothes</li><li>21. Have a pet visit</li><li>22. Cut pictures out of greeting cards</li><li>23. Wash silverware</li><li>24. Make bread</li><li>25. Set up a bird feeder</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>26. Sort objects such as beads or coins</li><li>27. Sing Christmas Carols</li><li>28. Say "Tell me more" when they start talking about a memory</li><li>29. Put silverware away</li><li>30. Play favorite songs and sing</li><li>31. Make a collage</li><li>32. Take a ride</li><li>33. Make a pie</li><li>34. Read aloud from labels</li><li>35. Dye Easter eggs</li><li>36. Fold socks</li><li>37. Take a walk</li><li>38. Reminisce about the first day of school or their first kiss</li><li>39. String Cheerios to hang outside for the birds.</li><li>40. Cut out pictures from a magazine</li><li>41. Sweep the patio</li><li>42. Colour paper shamrocks</li><li>43. Fold towels</li><li>44. Have afternoon tea</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>45. Dry dishes</li><li>46. Make a family tree</li><li>47. Colour flags</li><li>48. Water house plants</li><li>49. Play horseshoes</li><li>50. Dance</li><li>51. Sing hymns</li><li>52. Pop popcorn</li><li>53. Blow bubbles</li><li>54. Give a manicure or hand massage</li><li>55. Mold with PlayDoh</li><li>56. Look at pictures in National Geographic</li><li>57. Put simple puzzle together</li><li>58. Sand wood</li><li>59. Arrange fresh flowers</li><li>60. Trace and cut-out leaves</li><li>61. Read classic short stories</li><li>62. Sew sewing cards</li><li>63. Roll yarn into a ball</li><li>64. Remember great inventions</li><li>65. Decorate cookies or cupcake</li></ol>
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# Memory Box or Reminiscing Box

The kits or boxes, contain images and or objects that help stimulate memories from the past. Tailor these kits to reflect the past interests of the person with dementia. Try to include as many of the five senses as possible. (Ex: objects that you can feel, touch and smell.)

## Examples of memory box or kits

### Office memory Box

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pencils, eraser, ruler</li><li>• Old telephone</li><li>• Junk mail</li><li>• Rubber stamps</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• File Folders</li><li>• Envelopes</li><li>• Rubber bands</li><li>• calculator</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Typewriter/computer</li><li>• Paper clips</li><li>• Invoices/sales slips</li></ul>
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### Cooking / Baking Memory Box

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whisk</li><li>• Spices</li><li>• Oven Mitt</li><li>• Cookie cutter</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apron</li><li>• Measuring cups</li><li>• Rolling pin</li><li>• Plastic bowls</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cookbook</li><li>• Wooden spoon</li><li>• Non-electric mixer</li></ul>
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### Carpentry Memory Box

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Toolbox</li><li>• Tape measure</li><li>• Folding ruler</li><li>• C-clamp</li><li>• Carpenters apron</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sandpaper</li><li>• Planer (no blade)</li><li>• Pieces of wood with small holes to put screws in</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Screwdriver, screws</li><li>• Nuts &amp; bolts to assemble</li><li>• Carpenters pencil</li></ul>
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## Keep in mind...

As dementia progresses, a person may lose the ability to initiate activities and may not be able to do tasks as before. This does not mean that the person should stop participating in activities. Leisure activities are just as important as they were in the past. Being involved in activities that bring stimulation, enjoyment and satisfaction to everyday living is important for the person's quality of life. A person's involvement in meaningful, purposeful activities can define who they are and how they live their life. **When planning activities, it is important that all activities remain age appropriate, unless the person with dementia is enjoying a game or activity with someone younger.**

- Activities are the "things we do." These include getting dressed, doing chores, playing cards and paying bills. They can represent who we are and what we are about.
- Leisure activities can be active or passive.
- Activities enhance a person's sense of dignity and self – esteem by giving purpose and meaning to their life.
- Activities provide the person with dementia and the caregiver with a sense of security and stability that fosters fun and togetherness.

## Meaningful activity can be...

**Physical:** taking a walk, dancing

**Work related:** making notes, fixing things

**Social:** Having coffee, playing cards, board games-Dominoes, Jenga, Connect 4, puzzles

**Spontaneous:** conversation & discussion

**Spiritual:** singing hymns, gardening

**Mealtime:** preparing food, baking

**Creative:** painting, playing an instrument

**Chores:** dusting, doing laundry

**Other:** using computers and internet to skype, FaceTime, and other online platforms to allow visits, virtual tours, online book libraries, online exercise, yoga, meditation



# Additional Resources

- 101 Things To Do With the Person Who Has Alzheimer Disease, Sandy Bliss, Madonna Rehab Hospital, Lincoln, NE
- Quick and Easy Activities, Adapted from: Best Friends Approach to Alzheimer's Care, by Virginia Bell and David Troxel, Health Professionals Press, Inc. Baltimore, 1997
- Alzheimer Society of British Columbia (January 2011) Matching Activities with Abilities
- All About Me Booklet - <https://alzheimer.ca/en/sk/Living-with-dementia/I-have-dementia/All-about-me>
- ByUsForUs Guides - <https://alzheimer.ca/en/bc/Living-with-dementia/I-have-dementia/Health-and-well-being/By%20Us%20For%20Us%20Guides> Two recommended: [Memory Workout](#) and [Living and Celebrating Life through Leisure](#)
- Other sites to look at: Our Dementia Choir with Vicky McClure – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1WaemGq8QM>
  - Alive Inside – <http://www.documentarymania.com/player.php?title=Alive%20Inside>
  - <https://www.socialdistancingfestival.com>
  - <https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/landmarks-monuments>
  - <https://www.discoveryeducation.com/learn>

# Alzheimer Society Resource Centres

## **Dementia Helpline**

Province Wide

1-877-949-4141

[helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Cypress Resource Centre**

Swift Current

306-773-2683

[cypress@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:cypress@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Prairie North Resource Centre**

Battleford

306-445-2206

[prairienorth@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:prairienorth@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Prince Albert Parkland Resource Centre**

Prince Albert

306-773-2683

[paparkland@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:paparkland@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Regina Qu'Appelle Resource Centre**

Regina

306-949-4141

[regina@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:regina@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Saskatoon Resource Centre**

Saskatoon

306-683-6322

[saskatoon@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:saskatoon@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Sun Country Resource Centre**

Estevan

306-842-2273

[suncountry@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:suncountry@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Sunrise Resource Centre**

Yorkton

306-786-3600

[sunrise@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:sunrise@alzheimer.sk.ca)