

## ACTIVITY IDEAS WHEN CARING FOR SOMEBODY WITH DEMENTIA

While caring for a relative or friend with dementia may be fulfilling, it's often physically and emotionally exhausting. As a family caregiver, you are likely dealing with the day-to-day grind of providing care – medical appointments, managing medications, paperwork, paying bills, grocery shopping, cleaning, and the list continues. While focusing on the monotony and challenges of the everyday, it's easy to overlook opportunities, or not carve out opportunities, for meaningful and fun interactions that you can enjoy with your relative or friend.

Listed below are some activity ideas we encourage you to try. Engaging in these may provide joy or a sense of purpose for your friend or relative. You may find that certain activities awaken forgotten joyful memories, reduce feelings of sadness and anxiety, or that the engagement with the environment or other people results in increased alertness. As the family caregiver, you may find these activities leave you with lasting memories to treasure. You may also find that you and your friend or relative establish new connections with others who are in a similar care situation, leading to mutual support.

In selecting activities to do together, it is important to consider what your friend or relative can do now instead of what they used to be capable of doing. This is not the time to provide challenges to learn something new, but the time to gain more confidence and pleasure in doing activities that they can remember and easily perform. Keep in mind that dementia affects behavior and senses as well as memory, so some activities may need to be modified or simplified.

Activities can be active or passive. For example, group exercise is active but watching a movie is a passive exercise. Activities can be planned, like playing bingo, or can involve doing daily living activities like folding laundry or watering plants. Activities can also include socialization or religious engagement.

### ACTIVITY IDEAS

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#### 1. Exercise

Physical exercise varies depending on your friend or family member's physical capability. Set a routine and a set time of day and/or week devoted for physical activity. Exercise often improves sleep patterns and sleep quality. Walking is a great way to keep physically active, enjoy the outdoors and have fun. The length of the walk can vary, depending on capability. Chair exercises are an option too, such as stretching or yoga.

#### 2. Music

Music can be a powerful aid in calming a person, bringing back fond memories, and improving quality of life. Playing games that involve music, like singalongs, can be enjoyable together or with a group of other family members or friends joining in the fun. Depending on whether your friend or family member is still able to read, you may choose songs that are very familiar or don't require reading lyrics. Short catchy tunes that are

repetitive are ideal as they are easy to follow. If the tune is familiar but not the words, you can hum the tunes as well. The link below has songs from the 30's and 40's.

<http://www.eldersong.com/books-sing-along-with-eldersong-special-volumes-1-2-3-4.html>

Keep in mind that simply playing music is often relaxing and enjoyable.

3. Household Chores or Tasks

Engaging in familiar tasks with you around the house can be both satisfying, confidence-building and enjoyable. Tasks like sweeping the patio, wiping windows or tables, dusting, folding laundry, setting the table, or vacuuming can be productive and rewarding.

Depending on the progression of dementia, tasks may need to be modified. Keep in mind that the intention is not for tasks to be completed perfectly but to give the person a sense of purpose, a sense of feeling valued and useful. The chore may also keep the person engaged, allowing you, the family caregiver, to focus your attention on another task, knowing that the person is safe and occupied.

4. Organizing

If the person for whom you are caring used to take pleasure in maintaining an organized home or work space, organizing could be an agreeable task, provided you keep in mind that your friend or relative's ability may not be the same as before. Sorting clothes, re-arranging bookshelves, clipping coupons, organizing silverware or organizing a junk drawer are all activities to consider. You would likely need to simplify and/or modify tasks and may need to do activities together to ensure safety.

5. Cooking

This could involve simple baking, heating pre-made food, chopping (with a blunt knife) soft fruit or popping popcorn.

6. Crafts and Hobbies

These can be physically and mentally engaging, like working with play dough, cutting pictures and pasting them in a book or on a sheet of paper, painting or decorating a small object like a box or a picture frame or making a scrapbook.

7. Watching and Listening

If your friend or family member had a favorite TV program or enjoyed watching comedies or musicals, you could select a program that does not have a complicated theme and watch together. You could provide commentary so that this activity is more engaged than just passively watching TV together. You could also watch favorite movies or musicals. However, do keep in mind that, sometimes watching can provide too much stimulation, and the person may become overwhelmed and anxious if they are unable to follow along. Listening to familiar or uncomplicated books on tape can be a less stimulating and pleasurable alternative. Looking at old pictures or videos can also be a lot of fun.

8. Games

Games can provide mental stimulation and social engagement. Selecting the right game is important and should be based on the person's current abilities. Games can be simple group exercises or naming objects in pictures, to more complex activities like playing checkers or dominoes, doing jigsaw puzzles or playing trivia.

9. Outings

Visiting a garden, attending an art show or talk, strolling through a museum, or going to a baseball game are all activities that may be enjoyable for both you and your friend or family member.

10. Pet therapy

Research has shown that people with dementia respond well when in contact with pets like dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, etc. Not only does spending time with pets improve their mood but it also encourages them to be more engaged in helping with pet care. Click here <https://www.verywell.com/how-does-pet-therapy-benefit-people-with-dementia-98677> to read an article that provides more information about the benefits of interacting with pets.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. <https://www.goldencarers.com/20-practical-activities-for-people-living-with-alzheimers-disease/3778/>
2. <https://www.kindlycare.com/dementia-alzheimers-activities/>
3. <https://www.unforgettable.org/blog/things-to-do-activities-for-someone-with-dementia/>
4. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/alzheimers/how-animal-therapy-helps-dementia-patients.aspx>
5. <https://hummingbirdproject.net/>