

10 Spiritual Activities for people with Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's Disease is the most common cause of dementia.

Dementia afflicts one in ten people over 65 years of age and sadly can occur in younger people as well. Related: [What is Dementia? Alzheimer's vs Dementia](#)

Religious & Spiritual Needs

Spiritual support for people living with Alzheimer's Disease in nursing homes and other long term care facilities is vital to their well-being and a requisite for the holistic care we strive to achieve.

Leisure & Lifestyle staff can play an important role in assisting residents to maintain their religion or spirituality. Religion and spirituality are closely related but they are not the same.

Spirituality goes beyond what we can see and perceive. It is not an easy term to define as every individual thinks of it in a different way.

Religion on the other hand is an established set of beliefs and traditions that includes ritual, prayers and the worship of a God or deity.

Facilitating the Spiritual and Religious wishes of individuals

Spiritual and religious activities for people with Alzheimer's Disease can profoundly influence their sense of well-being. Activities may include attending Mass, praying or singing together, creating a shrine, or receiving faith counsel from a Minister of religion.

Remember, your role is merely to facilitate the religious or spiritual wishes of residents in consultation with the individual and their relatives. At all times staff should remain mindful of preserving the professional nature of the relationship.

10 Spiritual Activities for People living with Alzheimer's



1. Sacred Music

Music touches us all. Many people with dementia will have memories of hymns they sang as children or at a younger age. Play religious songs and hymns from their era for comfort and spiritual well being. Encourage residents to sing or hum familiar songs.

2. Create an alter or shrine

Buddhists and Hindus need a personal space to pray and make offerings. Talk to the person and make a list of what they would like to create or add to their shrine. Sometimes your required assistance may be bringing fresh flowers from the garden or changing the water on a daily basis.

3. Story-telling

Story-telling encourages positive rapport between staff and residents/families. Show a nice picture (or pictures) to the client and encourage them to make up a story about it. You may use pictures from calendars or coffee-table books. Ask questions to help them along. One of the many advantages of this activity is it that it does not require the person to remember anything.

4. Radio broadcasts or TV Devotions/Mass

Some people are accustomed to hearing religious services on the radio or seeing them on TV. Facilitate access to these services by reminding them of services and assisting with radio

tuning or escorting them to the TV set.

5. Nature related Spiritual Care

Nourish the spirit with nature. Take client to:

- Listen & watch birds outdoors
- Visit farm animals
- Pet baby animals
- Sit under a majestic tree
- Visit the shore to watch and listen to the waves
- Watch the stars under the night sky

Related: [Outdoor Activities for the Elderly](#)

6. Rest related Spiritual Care

- Slow walk or wheelchair stroll around the garden
- Sitting in silence
- Holding hands

7. Reading poems or passages from the Bible or other books of faith

Rhyming poems may bring happy memories and assist with the recall of important life events. Poetry reading is said to improve mood and concentration in people with Alzheimer's Disease. Print some poems in large fonts and encourage residents to read to others.

Related: [Poetry & Reminiscing for the Elderly](#)

8. Massaging hands/feet/shoulders

The therapeutic benefits of massage for the elderly are well documented. Massage for the elderly involves gentle strokes and kneading. Place a few drops of essential oils such as lavender or geranium in an ounce or 30 mls of carrier oil such as almond or jojoba. Mix and gently apply. It brings pleasure and relieves tension.

Related: [Aromatherapy & Massage for the Elderly](#)

9. Retrieval of positive memories

Reminiscing about happy memories encourages the client to resort to long-term memory which may still be remembered with clarity. Use props like: music, photos, gifts, and other keepsakes.

10. Listening to music

The Mayo Clinic suggests that music can have many beneficial effects ranging from reducing feelings of physical pain to enhancing memory. Music genre depends on the individual, as taste varies widely. You may try introducing residents to some classical music that may bring comfort and calm such as Bach's 'Goldberg Variations' or Mozart's 'Clarinet Concerto in A'.

Related: [The Benefits of Individual Music Activities for the Elderly](#)

We'd love to hear your feedback.

How do you support the spiritual needs of your clients?