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# Reminisce Therapy For People With Dementia

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Reminiscence therapy is a type of therapy for people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. This type of therapy encourages a person to recall and share positive memories of the past and important life events. It can help improve memory, cognitive function, and well-being.



Credit: Photo Illustration by Michela Buttignol for Verywell Health; Getty Images

## What Is Reminiscence Therapy?

Reminiscence therapy involves encouraging people with dementia to share memories from the past. The treatment aims to stimulate the mind and improve general well-being. <sup>[1]</sup>

Clinicians use reminiscence activity and therapy in clinical settings and residential care for older adults who have [dementia](#), including Alzheimer's disease. Caregivers and professionals can then instruct friends and relatives on how to do this exercise with their loved ones.

## Techniques

Reminiscence can be used in individual, group, or family sessions. It is generally categorized into three main types: <sup>[2]</sup>

**Simple reminiscence:** In this type of therapy, participants reflect on the past in an informative and enjoyable way.

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**Life story:** This therapy aims to develop a biographical narrative that pulls together the past, present, and future. This technique may involve helping someone make a book about their life.

Occasionally, participants may recall unpleasant and stressful information. Sometimes this can be either the cause or the result of behavioral and emotional issues. Nevertheless, dealing with unpleasant memories can often help someone come to terms with life events and find closure.

Different senses can help a person recall past events. Even people who have difficulty communicating verbally can use their senses to participate in reminiscence therapy: <sup>[1]</sup>

**Visual:** Looking at family keepsakes or photo albums with someone who has dementia may help bring up memories and encourage them to share anecdotes from the past. Asking open-ended questions can help them remember past events and stories about loved ones.

**Aural:** [Music](#) can help spark memories. Keep a collection of your loved one's favorite music, especially from their childhood or young adult years, to help them reminisce about the past.

**Smell or taste:** You can also help encourage reminiscing by cooking some of your loved one's favorite recipes. Taste and smell can be very effective at stimulating memories, especially foods that were favorites during childhood or were often cooked for special occasions. Other types of smells can also stimulate memory, such as the smell of a certain flower or perfume.

**Tactile:** Sometimes the sense of touch can help inspire reminiscence. Holding a family keepsake or wearing an old piece of jewelry may evoke positive memories of the past.

## How It Helps Memory

While people with [Alzheimer's disease](#) have difficulty with their more recent [memory](#), they may be able to recall things from their childhood.

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many times over many decades. <sup>[1]</sup>

The goal of reminiscence therapy is [not to cure](#) the disease, as there is none. Instead, the purpose of reminiscence is to help people with dementia affirm their long-term recall ability.

People with dementia often feel frustrated with their short-term memory limitations. But, by focusing on things they can remember, reminiscence therapy can help people with Alzheimer's feel a sense of mastery over their memory and cognition skills.

A 2022 meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that in older people with Alzheimer's disease, reminiscence therapy had a positive effect on global cognition and helped relieve depression. <sup>[3]</sup>

## Benefits

This type of [dementia therapy](#) offers a sense of value, importance, belonging, power, and peace. It can also create a feeling of intimacy and give special meaning to relationships with caregivers. Research has named the following as benefits of reminiscence therapy:

**Helps depression:** Depression is common in people with memory disorders. Some research has found that reminiscence therapy may be comparable to medication and other therapeutic approaches to treating and preventing depression in people with dementia. <sup>[1]</sup>

**Improves quality of life:** Research suggests that improved quality of life is a primary outcome of reminiscence therapy. This improvement was seen not only for those treated but for the carers, as well. <sup>[4]</sup>

**Facilitates communication and interaction:** Research indicates that reminiscence therapy may positively impact a person's communication and interaction. <sup>[1]</sup>

**Improves relationship with the caregiver:** Some studies make a tentative suggestion that reminiscence therapy could improve a person's relationship with their caregiver. The theory is that reminiscence therapy

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## Adverse Outcomes

Research has not found evidence of adverse outcomes with the use of reminiscence therapy. However, there is a risk that recalling [memories](#) can sometimes be painful or difficult.

## Using Reminiscence in Daily Life

You don't need to be a trained caregiver to participate in reminiscence therapy. The following are some ways that friends and family members can engage in this kind of therapy with their loved ones: <sup>[5]</sup>

**Ask open-ended questions:** These questions request more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Follow-up questions can help keep the memories and stories flowing.

**Leave space for emotions:** Memories can sometimes be painful, but that doesn't make them "bad." If your family member starts to cry, listen, sympathize, and tell them it's okay to feel sad.

**Use objects as prompts:** Ask your friend or family member about their photographs and souvenirs.

**Engage the senses:** Smelling and tasting familiar foods, dancing, and listening to music are all examples of things that can conjure memories.

You can use this therapy throughout the day. Try asking questions during normal caregiving activities to make them more personal and pleasant. Some examples include:

Mealtime

Bathing

Bedtime

When giving [medication](#)

When going for a walk