

ACTIVITIES AT HOME

PLANNING THE DAY FOR A PERSON LIVING WITH MIDDLE- OR LATE-STAGE ALZHEIMER'S

ACTIVITIES AND DEMENTIA

A person living with dementia will eventually need assistance in planning daily activities and maintaining an active lifestyle, which can:

- Enhance self-esteem.
- Structure time.
- Provide a sense of engagement, usefulness, accomplishment and dignity.
- Create feelings of security and togetherness.
- Reduce behavior such as wandering.

10 TIPS FOR ACTIVITIES AT HOME

1. Be flexible and patient.
2. Encourage involvement in daily life.
3. Avoid correcting the person.
4. Help the person remain as independent as possible.
5. Offer opportunities to make choices.
6. Simplify instructions.
7. Establish a familiar routine.
8. Respond to the person's feelings.
9. Simplify, structure and supervise.
10. Provide encouragement and support.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

Daily routines may include:

- **Chores:** Dusting, sweeping, doing laundry.
- **Mealtime:** Preparing food, cooking, eating.
- **Personal care:** Bathing, shaving, dressing.

Other activities may include:

- **Creative:** Painting, playing the piano.
- **Intellectual:** Reading a book, doing puzzles.

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- **Physical:** Taking a walk, playing catch.
 - **Social:** Having coffee, talking, playing cards.
 - **Spiritual:** Praying, singing a hymn.
 - **Spontaneous:** Visiting friends, dining out.
 - **Work-related:** Making notes, fixing something.

PLANNING ACTIVITIES

FOCUS ON THE PERSON

Consider the person's tastes, strengths, abilities and interests. As the disease progresses, be ready to make adjustments.

Keep the person's skills and abilities in mind

Stick with activities the person has always enjoyed. Adjust, as needed, to match the person's current abilities.

Pay attention to what the person enjoys

Take note when the person seems happy, anxious, distracted or irritable. Some people enjoy watching sports, while others may be frightened by the fast pace or noise.

Consider whether the person begins activities without direction

Does he or she set the table before dinner or sweep the kitchen floor mid-morning? If so, consider incorporating these activities into the daily routine.

Be aware of physical difficulties

Consider if the person tires quickly or has difficulty seeing, hearing or performing simple movements. Avoid challenging activities.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT ACTIVITY

Focus on enjoyment, not achievement

Choose activities that build on current skills. A professional artist might become frustrated over a declining quality of work, but an amateur might enjoy new opportunities for self-expression.

Encourage involvement in daily life

Tasks like wiping countertops and emptying wastebaskets can provide a sense of accomplishment and help the person feel like an active and valued member of the household.

Relate activity to work life

A former office worker might enjoy activities that involve organizing, like putting coins in a holder, helping to assemble a mailing or making a to-do list. A former farmer or gardener may like working in the yard.

Look for favorites

A person who has always read the newspaper may still enjoy doing so, even if he or she can no longer fully understand the content.

Change activities as needed

Try to be flexible and acknowledge the person's changing interests and abilities.

Consider time of day

Caregivers may find they have more success with certain activities at specific times of day, such as bathing and dressing in the morning. Make modifications to your daily routine as needed.

Adjust activities to disease stages

As the disease progresses, you may want to introduce more repetitive tasks. Be prepared for the person to eventually be less active.

CONSIDER YOUR APPROACH

Offer support and supervision

You may need to demonstrate the activity and provide step-by-step directions.

Concentrate on the process, not the result

Try to focus on what matters: spending time together and helping the person feel useful.

Be flexible

If the person insists that he or she doesn't want to do something, it may be because of inability or fear. If the person insists on doing something a different way, let them and correct any mistakes later, if necessary.

Be realistic and relaxed

Avoid filling every minute with an activity. The person living with dementia needs a balance of activity and rest, and may need frequent breaks.

Help get the activity started

Many people living with the disease still have the energy and desire to do things but lack the ability to organize, initiate and complete tasks.

Break activities into simple, easy-to-follow steps

Focus on one step at a time. Too many directions at once can be overwhelming.

Assist with difficult parts of the task

If you're cooking and the person can't measure the ingredients, finish the measuring and encourage a different task, such as stirring.

Let the individual know he or she is needed

Ask: "Will you please help me?" Be careful, however, not to make too many requests.

Make the connection

If you ask the person to make a card, he or she may not respond. But if you say that you're creating a special get-well card for a friend, the person may agree to participate.

Don't criticize or correct

If the person enjoys a harmless activity — even if it seems insignificant or purposeless to you — encourage him or her to continue.

Encourage self-expression

Include activities that allow an outlet for expression, such as painting, drawing or listening to music.

Engage through conversation

While you're polishing shoes, washing the car or cooking dinner, explain what you're doing. Even if the person cannot respond, he or she can benefit from the interaction.

Substitute an activity for a behavior

If a person with dementia is rubbing the table, provide a cloth and encourage the person to wipe it. Or, if he or she is moving their feet on the floor, play music to encourage tapping to the beat.

Try again later

If an activity isn't engaging the person's interest, it may be the wrong time of day or that the activity is too complicated. Try again later or adapt accordingly.

MODIFY THE ENVIRONMENT

Make activities safe

Remove hazardous materials and tools from a workshop so an activity like sanding a piece of wood can be enjoyable and safe.

Change your surroundings

Place scrapbooks, photo albums or old magazines in easily accessible spots to encourage the person to reminisce.

Minimize distractions

Certain settings, even if in a familiar place surrounded by familiar sounds, can be upsetting to a person living with dementia. Minimizing distractions can help prevent uneasiness.

CREATING A DAILY PLAN

When planning the day for a person living with dementia, consider that there are days when he or she may want variety and others when routine is best. Try to find enjoyable activities that provide meaning and purpose.

Consider keeping a daily journal to note:

- Which activities worked best and why?
- Which didn't work?
- Were there times with too much going on or too little to do?
- Were spontaneous activities enjoyable or did they create anxiety and confusion?

Use what you learn to set up a daily plan so you can spend less time and energy figuring out what to do. Allow flexibility for spontaneous activities and rest.

Measuring the plan's success

To determine if the daily plan is working, consider the person's response to each activity. The success of an activity may vary from day to day. In general, if the person seems bored, distracted or irritable, it may be time to introduce another activity or take a break.

Structured and pleasant activities often reduce agitation and improve mood. The type of activity and how well it's completed is not as important as the joy and sense of accomplishment the person gets from doing it.

SAMPLE DAILY PLAN

Morning

- Wash, brush teeth, get dressed.
- Prepare and eat breakfast.

- Have a conversation over coffee.
- Discuss the newspaper, try a craft project, reminisce over old photos.
- Take a break, have some quiet time.
- Do some chores.
- Take a walk or play a game.

Afternoon

- Prepare and eat lunch, read mail, wash dishes.
- Listen to music, do crossword puzzles, watch TV.
- Do some gardening, take a walk, visit a friend.
- Take a short break or nap.

Evening

- Prepare and eat dinner, clean the kitchen.
- Talk over coffee and dessert.
- Play cards, watch a movie, give a massage.
- Take a bath, get ready for bed, read a book.

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