Sensory Stimulation Activities for People With Alzheimer’s and Dementia

by BECKY YOUNG

Activities for Dementia Patients

What comes to mind when you think about activities for dementia patients Alzheimer’s patients and other types of dementia? Perhaps you imagine a group of people doing light exercises in their chairs, or watching TV programs together.

Sure, these are ways to provide activities for dementia patients, but there are so many more possibilities out there. As Alzheimer’s caretakers we need to start thinking outside of the box because there are really important reasons to provide meaningful activities.

Alzheimer’s accounts for 50% to 80% of dementia cases. It’s is the most common form of dementia and will impair memory, thought processes and behavior.

While memory loss usually starts out mild in the beginning, the disease is progressive, so it worsens over time. In its final stages, it can limit a person’s ability to hold a conversation or even respond to people they know.

Alzheimer’s disease can often cause sufferers to withdraw from any activities, as well as their family and friends. But if those relationships and interests can be maintained, it can help to reduce the effects of severe cognitive impairment, which then leads to a better quality of life.

Stimulating Activities Bring Joy to People With Alzheimer’s

After an Alzheimer’s diagnosis it is important to keep your loved ones active in hobbies and interests that have given them pleasure in the past. In doing so, you will be helping them to stir memories and foster emotional connections with others.

Meaningful activities will encourage self-expression and can also lessen the anxiety and irritability that Alzheimer’s may bring. People with Alzheimer’s need to feel more engaged with life and ensuring their days are filled with significant moments will achieve this.

Which Activities Are Best Suited for People With Dementia and Alzheimer's?

This really does depend on the individual. You do not just want to fill their time — you want them to engage in activities they are emotionally connected to.

In this way, they get to continue their sense of self. You need to consider interests that they have always had.

Some activities may need to be altered slightly for reasons of practicality or safety. Keep in mind that Alzheimer’s

also affects behavior and the senses in addition to memory. Because of this, you may find that activities that a person once enjoyed may become overwhelming or even frustrating.

However, you can usually find a way around this by identifying what it is that is troubling them and modifying the activity accordingly. For example, a person who has always loved the theater may now find the noise and the crowds are too much for them. Instead try to get copies of their favorite productions on DVDs, so they can watch at a volume that is comfortable for them in the safety of their own home or yours. You could even do ice cream at intermission!

Some Suggested Activities for Dementia and Alzheimer's Sufferers

I've put together a list of 10 activities for you to try with your loved one. Certain activities may work better at different times of day.

It's all about trial and error, but be aware that people with Alzheimer's tend to become more irritable and confused in the evenings. You also need to understand that their level of interest or involvement may decline as the disease progresses.

- Play some music and maybe have a sing-along!
- Do arts and crafts, such as knitting or painting. Keep tools and patterns as simple as you can.
- Organize household or office items. It can really help a person to feel useful.
- Clean around the house. Wipe the table, sweep the patio, fold towels or try other household tasks that will help the person feel a sense of accomplishment.
- Tend the garden or visit a botanical garden.
- Read the newspaper.
- Look at books the person used to enjoy.
- Cook or bake simple recipes together.
- Work on puzzles. This is particularly useful for delaying cognitive decline.
- Watch family videos. You may find your loved ones getting emotional, but it will be therapeutic for them.

Always Be Flexible and Supportive

If your loved one is resistant to an activity, take a break. You can try again later, or ask them how the activity could be changed to make it more enjoyable for them or what they would rather do.

Concentrate on the process of an activity and not the results. It does not matter if you never get the puzzle put together. What matters is that your loved one enjoyed the time spent on it and with you.

Too often people with Alzheimer's, whether they are at home, in assisted living or a care home, are under-stimulated and unengaged in life. They might half-heartedly leaf through a magazine that they are not interested in or have a program on the TV that their caregiver chose. As a society, it is down to us to change this approach and start putting real thought into activities our loved ones can still draw a great deal of enjoyment from.