

# Activities for Adults with Dementia

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## General Guidelines

- Avoiding "Empty Day Syndrome" helps behaviors such as "Sundowning" and wandering
- Select and modify activities according to individual's ability level
- Use both visual and verbal instruction (model the activity; explain slowly, one step at a time)
- Tactile and muscular feedback work even better for later stages (manipulate individual's limbs gently)
- Simplify or break activity into smaller components for success; one-on-one interaction
- Repeat well-liked activities; provide activities that offer positive results; know the person

## Arts & Crafts

- Paste a theme collage: animals, babies, occupations, WWI, WWII, etc.
- Seasonal crafts: prepare in advance and simplify steps
- Paint or draw with watercolors or crayons (limit 2 or 3 colors)
- Simple shapes with plastic modeling clay (it's not messy)

## Reminiscence

- Reminiscence: the joy of memories; use visual prompts like photo albums
- Focus on easy recollections—use props like old clothes or knickknacks if necessary
- Organize or enjoy photo, stamp, coin albums together

## Pets are Calming

- Live pets present some risks but give feeling of unconditional acceptance
- Bird watching, aquariums

## Music Therapy

- Dancing, rhythm band or clapping to music
- Sing-a-longs: old hymns, patriotic songs, old-time ditties
- Musical reminiscence: big band era, old war tunes
- Learn individual music preferences and bring tapes from library
- Music boxes, especially ones with figurines on top
- Exercise to music—simple aerobics/chair exercises (toss a ball or balloon)

## Activities for Adults with Dementia

### Books or Magazines (Ideals, Country Living)

- Read a short magazine story together—especially one with pictures
- Read poetry and bring appropriate picture individual can look at
- Read a newspaper article
- Browse clothing catalogs

### Ball Games (Produce enthusiastic participation/promote longer attention span)

- Ball games with heavy-duty helium filled balloons work well
- Use soccer sized, soft ball; nerf ring toss, indoor bowling, indoor golf

### Housework & Yard Work

- Set table, dust, sort or fold laundry, sweep floors, wash dishes
- Rake, plant, sweep walk, water lawn, weed, pick off dandelions
- Knead bread, top pizza, make fruit salad, stir things

### Personal Activities

- Do hair or fingernails, give a shave (set up a barber chair and use apron)
- Offer to moisturize skin
- Take a walk: studies show ½ hour walk aid dementia patients in communication

### Stuffed Animals & Dolls

- Teddy bears—undressed are comforting; dressed are stimulating (use Velcro closures)
- Dolls—snapping, buttoning, zipping dolls' clothes are remembered activities

### Tactile Therapy

- Textured cloth & fur: nesting bags/last bag holds special treat (stimulate/satisfy)
- Balls of yarn—winding decreases agitation and disruptive behavior

### Flowers

- Arrange flowers in an unbreakable vase
- Gardening therapy (indoor & outdoor)

### Cards & Games & Role Play

- Coloring pictures
- Simplified Bingo; large piece jigsaw puzzles
- Matching cards or checkers by color or suit
- Old Maid or Go Fish with BIG cards
- Bring funny hats for you and the individual
- Bring clothing accessories: beware of safety problems

## **Activities for Adults with Dementia**

### **Busy Boxes, Busy Aprons, Activity Centers**

- Make boxes or aprons at home so they don't look like children's toys
- Include adult items: large ball bearing, latches, zippers, large nuts & bolts

### **Purses & Briefcases**

- Snapping kind works well and are interesting to hear
- Consider making purses into a busy box
- Clear plastic cosmetic container with items inside for women

### **Mechanical & Interactive Toys**

- Mechanical toys—such as Transformers  
Interactive stimulus objects—like "Chatty Cathy"