

Activities for Those with Alzheimer's Disease

Successful activities for those with Alzheimer's support a person's sense of self—bringing out his/her skills, memories and habits—while minimizing skills that may be compromised due to the disease. Former hobbies or interests of the person such as gardening, cooking, painting or singing may be good choices.

Routine is essential: Activities that are done regularly, even at the same time every day if possible, may help establish routine and increase the person's sense of stability. The caregiver should set up and then draw the person into the activity rather than asking if the person would like to engage in a particular activity.

Following are structured activity ideas that can involve and interest the person with Alzheimer's, helping to reduce disturbing behaviors associated with the disease such as agitation, anger, frustration, depression, wandering or rummaging.

Motor

- Walk (indoors or outside).
- Chair exercises.
- Stretch (in bed, if necessary).
- Hand dance.

Sensory

- Listen to the person's favorite music. Use live music, tapes or CDs; radio programs, interrupted by too many commercials, can cause confusion.
- Link music with other reminiscence activities; use photographs to help stir memories.
- Listen to books on tape.
- Watch television/movies.
- Look at picture books without words, especially of nature.
- Gentle hand or foot massage or nail polishing.
- Sniff perfume, soap, spices, etc.
- Work on basic art projects. Help the person begin the activity. If the person is painting, you may need to start the brush movement. Most other projects should only require basic instruction and assistance. Remember, the person doesn't need to finish in one sitting and the artwork is complete when the person says it is.

NOTE: Avoid sensory overload; eliminate competing noises by shutting windows and doors and by turning off the television.



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23 Main Road • Lehighton, PA 18235

610-377-4443

info@qualitypersonalcare.org
www.QualityPersonalCare.org

Interactive

- Hold a tea party with friends or relatives.
- Reminisce by looking at scrapbooks or old photos and asking, "Who is this? Tell me about ..."
- Play cards or board games such as checkers.
- Take a visit to the mall, a museum, or a friend's house.
- Plant and tend an indoor garden.
- Pet therapy: Match the animal's activity and energy level with that of the individual. For example, a lively dog might be appropriate for someone who can go out for a walk; a cat may be more appropriate for a person who is less mobile.

Cognitive

- Practice computerized memory exercises.
- Do crosswords or any other puzzles.
- Play memory games such as "Concentration", "Simon", or "Let's name all the words we know beginning with 'A'".
- Play "I Spy".
- Play "Name that Tune".

