

# ACTIVITIES AT HOME

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PLANNING THE DAY FOR A PERSON  
WITH MIDDLE- OR LATE-STAGE DEMENTIA



## ACTIVITIES AND DEMENTIA

Activities are the “things we do.” They can be active or passive, done alone or with others.

A person with dementia will eventually need assistance to plan daily activities. As the disease progresses, these activities can enhance the person’s sense of dignity and self-esteem by giving more purpose and meaning to his or her life.

Activities also structure time. They can make the best of a person’s abilities and facilitate relaxation. Being active can also provide a sense of engagement, usefulness and accomplishment, which can help reduce behavior like wandering or agitation.

Both a person with dementia and his or her caregiver can enjoy the sense of security and togetherness that activities provide.

## EFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES

- » Bring meaning, purpose, joy and hope.
- » Use the person’s skills and abilities.
- » Are enjoyable.
- » Involve family and friends.
- » Are dignified and appropriate for adults.
- » Give the person a sense of normalcy.
- » Focus on the process, not the result.



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# 1. 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.
- » **Physical:** Taking a walk, playing catch.
- » **Social:** Having coffee, talking, playing cards.
- » **Spiritual:** Praying, singing a hymn.
- » **Spontaneous:** Visiting friends, going out to dinner.
- » **Work-related:** Making notes, fixing something.

# 2. PLANNING ACTIVITIES

## FOCUS ON THE PERSON

Consider the person's likes and dislikes, strengths and 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 setting the table, 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 take pleasure in working in the yard.

### **Look for favorites**

A person who always enjoyed reading the newspaper may still enjoy this activity, even if he or she can no longer completely 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**

Don't be concerned about filling every minute with an activity. The person 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 place too many demands on the person.

### **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 sending a special get-well card to a friend and invite him or her to join you, the person may enjoy the task.

### **Don't criticize or correct**

Even if the person enjoys a harmless activity that seems insignificant or meaningless, encourage him or her to continue.

### **Encourage self-expression**

Include activities that allow the person a chance for expression, such as painting, drawing or listening to music.



### **Involve the person through conversation**

While you're polishing shoes, washing the car or cooking dinner, talk about 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 rubs his or her hand on a table, provide a cloth and encourage the person to wipe the table. Or, if the person is moving his or her feet on the floor, play music so he or she can tap to the beat.

### **Try again later**

If the activity isn't working, 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**

A person with dementia may feel uncomfortable in certain settings even if in a familiar place or surrounded by familiar sounds. Minimizing distractions can help the person feel at ease.





## 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.

## 3. CREATING A DAILY PLAN

When planning the day for a person 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 your learnings 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.

## 4. 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 can 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 can 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

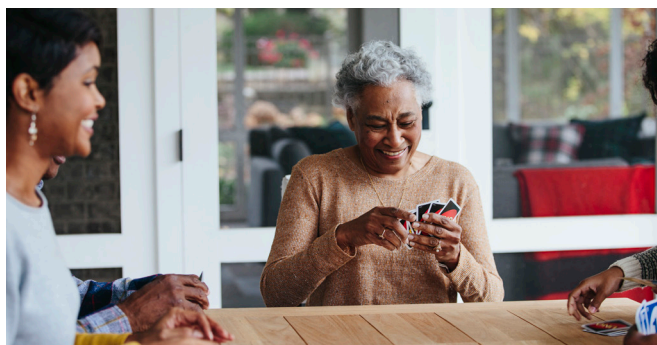
- » Wash, brush teeth, get dressed.
- » Prepare and eat breakfast.
- » Have a conversation over coffee.
- » Discuss the newspaper, try a craft project, reminisce about old photos.
- » Take a break, have some quiet time.
- » Do some chores.
- » Take a walk or play an active game.

## 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.
- » Reminisce 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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