

## Activity Suggestions for People with Memory Issues.

### General tips:

- **Keep the person's skills and abilities in mind.** Stick with activities the person has always enjoyed and adjust, as needed, to match the person's current abilities. A person with dementia may be able to play simple songs learned on the piano years ago. Bring these types of skills into daily activities.
- **Pay special 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 pace or noise.
- **Consider if the person begins activities without direction.** Does he or she set the table before dinner or sweep the kitchen floor mid-morning? If so, you may wish to plan these activities as part of the daily routine.
- **Be aware of physical problems.** Does he or she get tired quickly or have difficulty seeing, hearing or performing simple movements?
- **Focus on enjoyment, not achievement.** Find activities that build on remaining skills and talents. A professional artist might become frustrated over the declining quality of work, but an amateur might enjoy a new opportunity for self-expression.
- **Encourage involvement in daily life.** Activities that help the individual feel like a valued part of the household — like setting the table — can provide a sense of success and accomplishment. Keep in mind that you may need to “prep” the activity (for example, setting out the correct number of forks, knives, plates etc.).
- **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.** The person who always enjoyed drinking coffee and reading the newspaper may still find these activities enjoyable, even if he or she is not able to completely understand what the newspaper says.
- **Consider time of day.** Caregivers may find they have more success with certain activities at specific times of day, such as bathing and dressing later in the day.
- **Adjust activities to disease stages.** As the disease progresses, you may want to introduce more repetitive tasks. Be prepared for the person to eventually take a less active role in activities.

**Your approach:** If you notice a person's attention span waning or frustration level increasing, it's likely time to end or modify the activity.

- **Help get the activity started.** Most people with dementia still have the energy and desire to do things but may lack the ability to organize, plan, initiate and successfully complete the task.
- **Offer support and supervision.** You may need to show the person how to perform the activity and provide simple, easy-to-follow steps.
- **Concentrate on the process, not the result.** Does it matter if the towels are folded properly? Not really. What matters is that you were able to spend time together, and that the person feels as if he or she has done something useful.
- **Be flexible.** When the person insists that he or she doesn't want to do something, it may be because he or she can't do it or fears doing it. Don't force it. If the person insists on doing it a different way, let it happen, and change it later if necessary.
- **Break activities into simple, easy-to-follow steps.** Focus on one task 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 say, "Would you please stir this for me?"
- **Let the individual know he or she is needed.** Ask, "Could you please help me?" Be careful, however, not to place too many demands upon 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 working on this task with you.
- **Don't criticize or correct the person.** If the person enjoys a harmless activity, even if it seems insignificant or meaningless to you, encourage the person to continue.
- **Encourage self-expression.** Include activities that allow the person a chance for expression. These types of activities could include painting, drawing, music or conversation.
- **Involve the person through conversation.** While you're polishing shoes, washing the car or cooking dinner, talk to the person about what you're doing. Even if the person cannot respond, he or she is likely to benefit from your communication.
- **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 some music so the person can tap to the beat.

- **Try again later.** If something isn't working, it may just be the wrong time of day or the activity may be too complicated. Try again later or adapt the activity.

## **50 Activity Ideas**

### **Outside:**

- Take a walk
- Weed the garden
- Plant flowers
- Water plants
- Feed the birds
- Rake leaves
- Go to the park
- Sit on a bench or a swing
- Watch dogs at a dog park
- Play catch or toss a ball
- Go fishing
- Play horseshoes
- Visit a beach or forest preserve
- Sweep the porch or patio
- Set up a picnic on the lawn or in the backyard
- Sit on the porch and drink coffee, hot chocolate or lemonade

### **Inside.**

- Listen to the person's favorite music
- Look at family photo albums
- Prepare afternoon tea
- Watch a favorite sport on television
- Model with modeling clay or play dough
- Play checkers or dominos

- Name the presidents
- Look at photos in a photography book or magazine
- Identify states on a U.S. map
- Set up a work bench with nuts, bolts, wrench, wood, sandpaper
- Set up a desk with paper, office supplies
- Complete a puzzle together
- Read from one of their favorite books
- Watch a favorite movie or sitcom
- Watch a sporting event
- Ask the person about his or her childhood, siblings, school, pets or first car
- Read the newspaper together or read it to them
- Play a card game

**Do something personal.**

- Give the person a hand massage with lotion
- Brush his or her hair
- Give the person a manicure or pedicure
- Take photos of the person and make a collage
- Encourage the person to talk more about subjects they enjoy
- Make a family tree poster board

**Do something in the kitchen.**

- Bake cookies or bread
- Set the table
- Make the person's favorite lunch or snack
- Wash and dry dishes
- Put silverware away

**Celebrate family holiday traditions.**

- Listen to favorite holiday music

- Bake holiday desserts
- Color eggs
- Carve a pumpkin or make a pumpkin pie
- Decorate a tree
- Create holiday greeting cards
- Watch a favorite holiday movie
- Play a piano or guitar and sing holiday songs

It doesn't matter if the activity needs to be done or if it is done well. If it doesn't work, you can always try something else. Be patient and you will figure out what works.

Art and Music: Music and art allow for self-expression and engagement.

## **Music**

Music can be powerful. Studies have shown music may reduce agitation and improve behavioral issues that may happen in people with memory issues.

**Use these tips when selecting music for a person with memory issues:**

- Identify music that's familiar and enjoyable to the person. If possible, let the person choose the music.
- Choose a source of music that isn't interrupted by commercials, which can cause confusion.
- Use music to create the mood you want. For example, a tranquil piece of music can help create a calm environment, while a faster paced song from someone's childhood may boost spirit and evoke happy memories.
- Encourage movement (clapping, dancing) to add to the enjoyment.
- Avoid sensory overload; eliminate competing noises by shutting windows and doors and by turning off the television. Make sure the volume of the music is not too loud.

## **Art**

Art projects can create a sense of accomplishment and purpose. They can provide the person an opportunity for self-expression.

**When planning an art activity for someone with memory loss, keep these tips in mind:**

- Keep the project on an adult level. Avoid anything that might be demeaning or seem childlike.
- Build conversation into the project. Provide encouragement, discuss what the person is creating or reminiscence.
- 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.
- Use safe materials. Avoid toxic substances and sharp tools.
- Allow plenty of time, keeping in mind that the person doesn't have to finish the project in one sitting.