

Creating meaningful moments with your loved one

Do you struggle with finding activities that your loved one enjoys doing? If so, think back to what he or she used to enjoy. People's likes and dislikes don't dramatically change when they get Alzheimer's disease or another form of age-related dementia. Keep in mind, though, that the disease affects people's behavior and senses in addition to memory, and this means that activities a person once enjoyed may be overwhelming or even frustrating now.

Depending on the stage of dementia that your loved one is in, activities may need to be modified for safety or practicality. Before ruling out activities, try providing extra cues or encouragement. Above all, it is important to create meaningful activities not just ones that fill time.

Timing is everything! Certain activities may work better at different times of day. Family and friends need to understand that people living with a dementia will have times of the day when they are better able to concentrate on doing things.

If your loved one resists an activity, take a break. You can try again later or ask your loved one how the activity could be changed to make it more enjoyable. Remember to 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 felt useful.

Reminiscing about the good old days is usually enjoyable for all. Long-term memories are some of the last affected by dementia. Capturing your loved one's life story early in the disease process is pivotal. The Life Story is an essential part of the Best Friends™ Approach. It allows family and caregiving staff a way to be in the moment with individuals and talk about pleasant memories. As the disease progresses, persons with dementia often forget many aspects of their lives. It is up to us to be their biographers—we can help them remember their past hobbies and successes.

Music is powerful. Involvement in activities may decline as Alzheimer's progresses; however, music will usually remain steadfast in your loved one's life. Music is able to reach people at any stage of the disease. Studies have shown that music touches all lobes of the brain. It is very important to figure out individuals' musical preference including favorite genre and musicians, and if they once played a musical instrument, to encourage them to continue.

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Research has shown numerous benefits from reading traditional poetry. The work of poets such as Wordsworth or Keats is particularly beneficial. Hearing poems can trigger speech and memory for some people with Alzheimer's disease, according to experts in Britain. Also, reading aloud to people with dementia has been found to stimulate memories and imagination. Having loved ones read to you will help maintain the ability to talk. If they struggle with certain words, encourage them to keep reading.

Using technology can brighten your loved one's life. Many apps for smart phones and tablets can help with brain stimulation, hand-eye coordination, etc. Also, you can show recent pictures/videos of family, pets, vacation, etc. Music websites like Pandora or iTunes could be helpful, too. If you feel uneasy about technology, ask someone from the younger generation. They are usually very tech-oriented.

Activities for creating meaningful moments with your loved one:

- Remain physically active such as going for walks or exercising together
- Sing songs or play music
- Do arts and crafts, such as painting, knitting, or woodworking, but keep tools and patterns simple
- Organize household or office items, particularly if the person used to take pleasure in organizational tasks
- Clean or do other household tasks that give a sense of accomplishment
- Tend the garden or go to visit one
- Read the newspaper or favorite books
- Capture/assemble Life Story pieces
- Cook or bake simple recipes together
- Stimulate the mind such as working on puzzles or Sudoku
- Watch family videos
- Encourage interaction with family, friends, pets
- Maintain spiritual practices, if able



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