

Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS"

Make Alzheimer's Activities More Fun

Doing What's Enjoyed

Having fun and enjoying life is important for everyone. But people with Alzheimer's disease (AD) lose, little by little, the ability to do those things that they enjoyed in the past. Hobbies, concerts, guests can become too complicated for confused people.

Most caregivers focus on those activities the person with AD no longer should do, such as drive, work or go out alone. But, to help maintain good self-esteem, it is also important to help the person with AD continue to engage in meaningful activities and participate in family and community life. To do this, decide what activities he *can* do and help him adjust for abilities that are lost. **Accentuate the positive.**

Activities should **make the best use of a person's remaining strengths** and skills, and be based on interests and hobbies developed over a lifetime. These include activities like going for walks or gardening, which you can still enjoy together. Meaningful activities can also reduce the risk of agitation or upsetting behaviors.

We all enjoy experiencing things through our **senses**—smelling a flower, watching a sunset or a familiar taste or smell. Some people enjoy touching a smooth piece of wood, stroking a furry animal or placing their hand under running water. The **importance of touch** becomes even more important as AD progresses. Also when there is



no activity he can do, *touch* can become an important part of communication and simply holding hands becomes an activity.

There are many activities that encourage non-verbal (using body language, movement, etc.) **emotional expression**. For example, caring for plants or pets can help the person with AD to express feelings of caring. He or she will still appreciate signs of affection. Depending on your relationship, holding hands, hugging, brushing hair, rubbing on hand cream or other adult uses of *touch* (acceptable adult expressions of caring and concern) may provide emotional satisfaction to both of you.

Listening to **music and singing** can be both enjoyable and calming. Memory of song lyrics can remain longer than the person's ability to carry a conversation.

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Activities with children can bring joy and laughter. It also helps the person feel they are teaching or helping.

In the early stages, just a reminder or a cue may be enough to get him going, and he may be able to carry on from there.

To keep activities enjoyable—

- **Establish a routine** that includes a balance of rest and activity.

- **Recognize limitations.** Parties, trips, concerts may be too stimulating.

- **Adjust the activity** to make it possible for him to participate.

Don't tell a person with AD about an activity you have planned too far in advance, because this may cause anxiety, not pleasant expectation.

Finding the Right Activity

An activity doesn't have to be something out of the ordinary. Try modifying regular activities of daily life (ADLs) so that the person with dementia can still do them. Helping a person bathe is an opportunity to feel water, smell soap, tell a story.

Chores such as dusting, sweeping, doing laundry, preparing food and cooking can be satisfying activities. Even bathing, shaving and getting dressed can provide an opportunity for chatting and reminiscing, singing or telling jokes. Making these everyday ADLs enjoyable can improve cooperation, so you both can enjoy them.

- ✓ Consider ways the person in your care can continue to participate in **activities enjoyed in the past**: If he used to play tennis, but can no longer keep score, try just hitting the ball back and forth? If she enjoyed cooking, make a meal together.
- ✓ **Try something new.** In spite of AD or sometimes because of it, people often discover talents they may not have expressed before, such as painting, collage or even a greater sense of spirituality.
- ✓ Doing activities or chores that **recall a person's work-related past** can bring much happiness.
- ✓ Break an activity down into simple steps.
- ✓ Choose an activity that can be completed in a short time.

Be generous with praise, do not criticize or correct mistakes, although you may need to help if the activity becomes too difficult.

Don't get upset if she walks away in the middle of the project. People with AD are easily distracted and fatigued.

Source: *The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer's Disease; The 36-Hour Day*



Taking Care of Yourself— Save Time With Ready-Made Activities

While you may enjoy expressing your own creativity in devising activities for the person in your care, there are also “ready made” resources. Find catalogues with activities especially designed for people with dementia, as well as music and subjects that may remind the person of earlier times. Be careful not to use materials that look too childlike. However, simple puzzles, sorting, matching, and stacking blocks or shapes can be appropriate for people with dementia. As always, safety is a prime concern and games that have small pieces or that can be swallowed or that have sharp edges should be avoided.



Note Some people with AD get very upset watching violence on TV because they think it is real. Careful TV monitoring is important.

Inspiration

You can tell more about a person by what he says about others than you can by what others say about him.

~Audrey Hepburn

Live Life Laughing!

Don't worry! The doctor has performed many of these operations and has not cut himself once.



Don't Fall - Be Safe

A person with AD, even in the early stages, may have subtle changes in walking ability that will become more severe as time goes on. This can create difficulty with balance. If the person has other illnesses, the problems may be more severe. Any amount of exercise helps reduce risk, but get advice from the doctor about the best exercise routine.

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To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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From the publishers of

The Comfort of Home®
Caregiver Series

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC
PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296
800-565-1533
or www.comfortofhome.com

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SAFETY TIPS—Limitations and Solutions

Limitation	Tip
Poor memory	Focus on the present. "Today is a sunny day," rather than "Do you remember that winter snowstorm?"
Talking about the past	Use this opportunity to learn about the past (as the person currently remembers it).
Difficulty with orientation to time and place	Provide cues such as pictures of a toilet on the bathroom door or a spoon glued to the kitchen door to help the person find his way around the house.
Doesn't understand what to do	Simplify the instructions and speak slowly. <i>Show</i> how to do it.
Not paying attention	Perhaps he is tired, or the activity is not interesting, too difficult, or confusing; try at a later time.
The activity does not get done	Do not focus on the product. Keep reminding yourself it is not important.
The person with AD does it wrong	Keep your sense of humor!

NEXT ISSUE...WATCH OUT! SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS