



Activities of Daily Living

Activities

If you can help the person with dementia to find activities that they still enjoy you will improve their quality of life as well as your own. You will need to be imaginative and flexible in adapting activities to their changing capabilities as well as to their different moods.

Carefully selected activities can provide stimulation and variety within a safe environment and help people with dementia feel more confident. Try to make sure that:

- Activities chosen are those where the person will not worry about failing or being judged by their performance.
- You give encouragement and praise.

In the early stages, the person with dementia may be able to think of activities to keep themselves occupied but as it progresses, this may become more difficult and they will need more frequent prompting and assistance.

How activities can help

- Activities can help people maintain their skills and give them a sense of achievement.
- Activities can provide interest or fun and help the person feel better about themselves and be more alert and interested in what is going on around them.
- Some activities such as painting a picture or looking at old photographs may help people with dementia express their feelings, so be sensitive to their reactions.

Advantages for the carer

Some of the behaviour that carers find difficult may be due to boredom or frustration. Such behaviour sometimes lessens or even vanishes if the person is pleasantly occupied.

Sharing an enjoyable activity may help you find new ways to relate to the person with dementia and bring you closer.

Tips to remember

- Simple activities are often the best, particularly as dementia progresses. Look for those which provide stimulation, but avoid too many challenges or choices as these can be bewildering.
- People with dementia often retain their sense of humour. Look for opportunities for to share a good laugh.
- The person with dementia may find it hard to concentrate for any length of time so activities that can be enjoyed for short periods are often more satisfactory.
- In the later stages of dementia, you may find you have to work quite hard with the person in order to get a response. Think in terms of brief activities that will help break up the day and give you contact with the person, such as hand massage or listening together to some music.

Suggestions for activities

Some people may be able to continue with activities they previously enjoyed, such as playing the piano, reading, carpentry or sewing, for quite some time and need only a little prompting to do so. Others may find their previous activities too demanding or become upset because they can no longer carry them out to the same standard. You will need to be ready to adapt and simplify activities or find new ones that they can enjoy.

taken for granted in some cultures may be thought disrespectful in others. You may need to explain any religious observances such as prayer and festivals as well as other traditions to those providing care from a different culture.

A person with dementia is still an adult

It is important that everyone continues to treat the person as an adult and with courtesy, however advanced their dementia.

- Be kind and reassuring without talking down to the person with dementia as though they are a small child.
- Never talk over the head of a person with dementia or across them as though they are not there.
- Do not talk about the person with dementia in front of them unless they are included in the conversation.
- Avoid scolding or criticising the person as this will make them feel small.
- Look for the meaning behind what they may be trying to communicate even if it seems not to make sense.

Focus on abilities

Help the person avoid situations in which they are bound to fail since this can be humiliating. Look for tasks they can still manage and activities they can still enjoy.

- Give them plenty of praise and encouragement and let them do things at their own pace and in their own way.
- Do things with the person, rather than for them, so they can maintain some independence.
- Break activities down into small steps so that the person has some feeling of achievement, even if they can only manage part of a task.
- Much of our self-respect is often bound up in the way we look. Encourage the person to take pride in their appearance and give them plenty of praise.

Respecting privacy

Try to make sure that the person's right to privacy is respected.

- Suggest that people knock on their bedroom door before entering, for example.
- If the person needs help with intimate activities such as washing or going to the toilet, this should be done in a sensitive way. Make sure that the bathroom door is kept closed if other people are around.

Offering choice

It is important that the person with dementia should be informed and wherever possible consulted about matters which concern them. They should also be given every opportunity to make appropriate choices.

- Even if you are unsure how much the person can understand, always explain what you are doing and why. You may then be able to judge their reaction from their expression or body language.
- Although too many choices can be confusing, you can continue to offer choice by phrasing questions that only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer such as 'Would you like to wear your blue jumper today?'

Expressing feelings

Dementia affects the thinking and reasoning part of the brain and memory. It does not mean that the person no longer has feelings.

People with dementia are likely to be sad or upset at times. They have the right to expect those caring from them to try and understand how they feel and to make time to offer support rather than ignoring them or jollyng them along.

In the earlier stages, people may want to talk about their anxieties and the problems they are experiencing. It is important that others do not brush these worries aside, however painful they may be, but listen and show that they are there for them and will be there for them.

Feeling valued

The person with dementia needs to feel respected and valued for who they are now, as well as for who they were in the past. It helps if those caring:

- are flexible and tolerant
- can make time to listen and to chat and enjoy being with the person
- can show affection as appropriate.