

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS:

# INDOOR ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH DEMENTIA

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# PRINCIPLES FOR USING ACTIVITY

## **1. Select activities that tap into individual's previous or current interests, work and habits according to his or her ability level.**

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

## **2. Modify the activity (downgrade) to match abilities.**

- **Simplify.** e.g., reduce number or steps in an activity).
- **Provide both visual and verbal instructions.** Avoid directions that require memory skills such as the words right or left.
- **Break activities into simple, easy-to-follow steps.** Focus on one task at a time.
- **Be aware of physical problems.** Watch closely for overexertion or fatigue.

# PRINCIPLES FOR USING ACTIVITY

## 3. Relax the rules – there is no right way

- **The goal is for engagement and NOT to learn something new or perform an activity correctly.**

- **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. Assist with difficult parts of the task.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Stop an activity if participants lose interest.**

- **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.

# PRINCIPLES FOR USING ACTIVITY

## 4. Adjust activities to disease stages. At moderate stage, consider activities that:

- Are **repetitive** (vacuuming, sorting cards, place beads in a bin)
- Use **gross** motor (washing windows, folding clothes)
- Draw upon **procedural memory** (no new learning)
- **Tactile and muscular feedback** work even better for later stages (manipulate individual's limbs gently)

## 5. Consider time of day

- **Use more active activities mid-day and quiet activities in evening** : Integrate activity in a **structure daily routine** with 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.

# INDOOR ACTIVITIES

## **Knitting and painting. Keep patterns and tools simple:**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: If the person you care for has always knitted or done embroidery or tapestry you may find he or she retains these skills for a long time. You might have to encourage him or her to start and be prepared to help with each stage, but it is worth persevering. The end result can give a wonderful sense of satisfaction.



## **listen to music/comic dialogue/Peking Opera, sing songs, and dancing:**

[Applicable]: early, middle, or late stage

[Instruction]: Listening to those pieces which the older adults are familiar with will help him/she calm down, recall earlier life, improve physical and emotional well-being, and improve his/her life satisfaction. If the older adult is willing to, you can help him/she to put on headphones to enjoy.

# INDOOR ACTIVITIES

## **Card games/mahjong:**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: card game guidelines suited for two-people playing can be found from:

<https://www.zhihu.com/question/35566953>; for Mahjong or Chinese chess, you can play them as Domino. If the older adult is used to playing those games before he had the symptoms or during earlier life, he/she may still retain this skill.



## **Unite knots:**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: Loosely tie a few simple knots and ask your older adult to help you untie them.

## **Counting coins:**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

## **Sudoku:**

[Applicable]: early stage

[Instruction]: online downloadable from:

<https://shudu.one/sudoku-download.php>

# INDOOR ACTIVITIES

## **Name the zodiac animals , Chinese string-up puzzle, remembering old poems**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: If the older adult has his/her favorite poem which he/she always mentioned during earlier time, you can help him/her to remember together.



## **Gardening:**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: Gardening is a physical activity that provides an opportunity to get outdoors and is enjoyed by many people. The activity can be varied to suit the person's abilities - from general tidying to weeding, raking up leaves and watering the plants. There is also the satisfaction of watching the plants grow and enjoying their colors, smells and textures.

# INDOOR ACTIVITIES

## **Read the newspaper, stories, or his/her favorite books**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: If your loved one loved to read but is now struggling to do that, you could read them their favorite book. If the person would still like to read papers, magazines and books you can help by reading aloud and helping him or her go through the paper.



## **Household activities**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: Activities may include folding laundry, making beds and putting clothes away, clean out a drawer, helping preparing the meals or food, for example, making dough, making Huntun, or preparing beans



# INDOOR ACTIVITIES

## Reminisce

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: Do take time to talk about past events, as these memories may be the only ones remaining to the person and are therefore precious. This can be an enjoyable experience for both of you, especially if you are reminiscing about the times you have enjoyed together. It can strengthen the bond between you and remind you of all the good times.

## Puzzles; Jigsaws:

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: you can make your own puzzles or jigsaws by finding and cutting a colorful image from magazines or old calendars.



## Watch family videos/photos:

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: If the photos do not trigger any memories, you can help by labelling photos to identify who and where the people are. Keep pictures of particular interest around the house which the person with dementia can look at during quiet moments.

# INDOOR ACTIVITIES

## **Tai chi/qigong/meditation:**

[Applicable]: early or middle stage

[Instruction]: Tai chi and qigong are gentle forms of Chinese martial arts that combine simple physical movements and meditation with the aim of improving balance and health. The movements concentrate on a series of integrated exercises believed to positively affect the mind, body and spirit.

These forms of exercise focus on balance and stability which are important in staying agile and may reduce the risk of falls.

## **Walking:**

[Applicable]: early, middle, or late stage



[Instruction]: For early and middle stage, walking in the apartment with music/audio books on for 30 minutes will be helpful. It can be broken into small sessions like 15 minutes walking and then some gardening, and another 15 minutes of walking. For late stage, it is advised to start from sit and stand unsupported for a few minutes before walking to relax the muscles and prevent fall.