



# Fun Activities

for Seniors with Dementia

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## IN THIS PACKET:

 **EARLY-STAGE** DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES

 **MIDDLE-STAGE** DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES

 **LATE-STAGE** DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES

Whether a person is in the early, middle, or late stage of dementia, they still can participate in activities that are fun, engaging, and meaningful. However, choosing the most appropriate type of activity for people can be challenging, especially in the middle to late stages of the disease. It is important to remember to match activities to cognitive and functional capabilities and relate them to previous roles, habits, and interests. Even if an individual is not able to participate in hobbies they once enjoyed, they can still benefit from the sensory experience of an activity.

What follows is a list of activity ideas for individuals at each stage of dementia.

# EARLY-STAGE DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES

In the early stage of dementia, short-term memory loss is a barrier. An individual may need more time to process information, multi-tasking may be more difficult, and an individual may show an increased preference for familiar things. At this stage, cognitive and physical limitations are less severe and emotional and behavioral changes are mild.

Someone in the early stage of dementia can still be very active and independent, and they can participate in most activities without much difficulty. This stage is a great time for them to use memory aids that can help them complete daily activities without much assistance from others. For more information, please see the resource, *Memory Aids for Individuals with Dementia*.

Incorporating stimulating activities and creating a routine in the early stage of dementia are likely to help the individual maintain their cognitive abilities and remain independent longer. Encourage them to focus on completing the whole task to engage their minds. If they appear to be overwhelmed or confused when completing a task, try demonstrating first and break down the activity into simple steps.



**30 minutes**  
APPROPRIATE AMOUNT  
OF TIME TO FOCUS

## Activity ideas for early-stage dementia:



Exercise (taking walks, engaging in a favorite sport, exercise classes or videos)



Doing arts and crafts with grandchildren



Cooking meals, baking, and following recipes



Playing Bingo. Take them somewhere for Bingo night to encourage socialization.



Playing their favorite card or board games



Easy to moderate adult coloring pages



Doing puzzles, word games, similar mind-engaging activities



Watercolor painting or painting by number



Scrapbooking or creating a collage



Gardening and completing easy yard work tasks

## Additional Helpful Tips:

Since individuals in the early stage aren't severely hindered by dementia, you can also simply engage with them in their normal daily routine and hobbies.

### STRENGTHS

- ❑ Build on their abilities and strengths to help them maintain functional abilities as long as possible.
- ❑ Consider their interest, preferences, and life history when picking activities to make them more meaningful to the individual.

### INDEPENDENCE

- ❑ The goal is to have them complete tasks and activities as independently as they can for as long as possible while providing support when needed as the disease progresses.

### CONNECTION

- ❑ Try to find ways to keep them connected in relationships and community activities.
- ❑ Encourage them to socialize with family and friends and share life stories to help them connect with others.

### ROUTINE

- ❑ Having a daily routine provides structure and stability for the loved one with dementia. Using memory aids can help an individual stick to their routine. They may need assistance setting up devices or home in a way that helps them complete daily activities and remember important things.

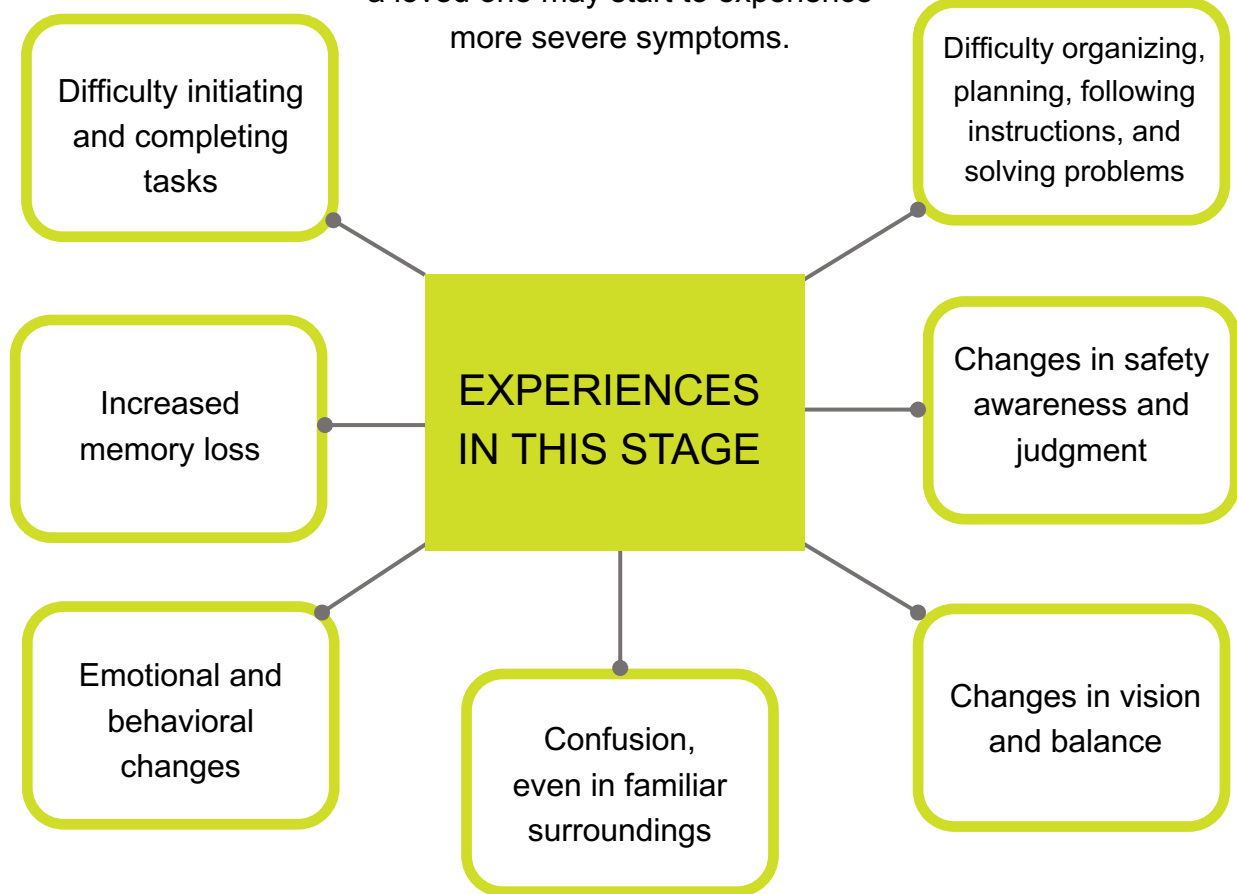
### SIMPLIFY

- ❑ Simplify activities over time to accommodate their abilities.
- ❑ Simplify the environment or workspace by removing clutter to avoid overwhelming the individual.



# MIDDLE-STAGE DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES

In the middle stage of dementia, a loved one may start to experience more severe symptoms.



In this stage, you will notice that your loved one will require more care and assistance with daily activities. Try to focus on games and activities that you can do together. If they are participating in an activity with multiple steps, provide one-to-two step instructions. You might notice that you have to repeat yourself before the individual understands instructions or requests. Remember to use a slow pace and allow additional time for your loved one to process information and respond.



**25**  
minutes

APPROPRIATE  
AMOUNT OF TIME  
TO FOCUS

# Activity ideas for middle-stage dementia:



## COOKING

- Completing specific steps of a cooking task such as whisking eggs, kneading dough, sieving flour, or stirring ingredients together.
- Cupcake decorating with two different colors of frosting to choose from.
  - Assist with decorating the first few cupcakes then allow them to try doing it on their own. You can use a piping bag or spatula but choose a method that works best for the individual.



## GAMES

- Playing simple card games (e.g., Go Fish, matching colors or suits)
- Playing Let's Go Fishin' may be a fun game to play if the individual enjoys fishing. Include the grandchildren in the game!
- Simple matching, pairing, and sorting activities (e.g. sorting objects by size or color)
  - Great options for sorting items are buttons, colorful beads, poker chips, bottle caps, silverware, jewelry, cards, rocks, nuts and bolts, and candy.
- Playing ball toss with a foam or inflatable beach ball. Try to involve other people!
- Playing rubber darts with you, friends, or family members



## EXERCISE

- Continuing to engage in simple exercises such as walks or riding a stationary bike. Other simple exercises could include:
  - Using a pedal pusher
  - Using a soft exercise ball for stretching
  - Using light stretch bands
  - Lifting light weights or household items such as soup cans
  - Simple water aerobics



## ART

- Doing simple art projects like cutting their favorite photos out of magazines or painting rocks or golf balls
- Coloring simple, large print coloring pages
- Decorating birthday cards with stickers or anything of their choosing
- Sculpting with clay or dough
- Singing and/or dancing to music they enjoy



## ANIMALS

- Having them engage with animals such as dogs or cats can be very therapeutic. Consider the individual's comfort level before introducing animals.



## HOUSEHOLD

- Simple home chores (e.g. folding laundry or setting the table)
- Completing simple steps for gardening such as filling flower pots, pushing bulbs into compost, and watering plants

# Additional Helpful Tips:

## STRENGTHS

- ❑ Build on the individual's abilities and strengths to help them maintain functional abilities as long as possible.
- ❑ Consider their interest, preferences, and life history to make activities more meaningful for them.
- ❑ Individuals with moderate dementia benefit greatly from music/entertainment. Include music they enjoy throughout the day or watch a favorite movie!

## INDEPENDENCE

- ❑ Provide structure or support to help the individual with dementia stay engaged. The goal is to have them complete tasks and activities as independently as they can for as long as possible while providing support as the disease progresses.
- ❑ Do activities with the person rather than for the person.

## CONNECTION

- ❑ Try to find ways to keep them connected in relationships and community activities.
- ❑ Encourage them to socialize with family and friends and share life stories to help them connect with others and reminisce.
- ❑ There are many ways to involve a loved one with daily activities. Even if the activities are simple chores or running errands, find ways to involve them in activities to make sure they feel included.

## REPETITION

- ❑ Individuals with moderate dementia benefit from repetition. They may have to practice or watch you demonstrate something a few times before they get the hang of a new activity.

## ROUTINE

- ❑ Having a daily routine provides structure and stability for the loved one with dementia. Plan activities for times during the day when your loved one typically functions at their best.
- ❑ Using memory aids can help an individual stick to their routine. They may need assistance setting up devices or home in a way that helps them complete their daily activities and remember important things a little easier.
- ❑ If your loved one appears agitated, assess the situation. Is there excess stimuli in the environment? Is it late afternoon and they're exhausted? If they are not wanting to get involved, do not pressure them. Take a break and try again later or choose a different activity after they have had some time to calm down and rest.

## SIMPLIFY

- ❑ Simplify activities over time to accommodate their abilities.
- ❑ Simplify the environment or workspace by removing clutter to avoid overwhelming the individual.
- ❑ Focus on the activity, not the outcome. It may be difficult for an individual with dementia to understand the goal of an activity. Just enjoy the process and the moment.
- ❑ People with dementia respond best to familiar and comforting experiences/stimuli in the environment. For additional environmental considerations, refer to the resource, *Environmental Modifications for Individuals with Dementia*.

# LATE-STAGE DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES

With late-stage dementia, individuals have more apparent physical and cognitive limitations and may require 24-hour care and assistance with daily activities. They will likely require regular cuing and redirection during activity engagement.

Persons with severe dementia should continue activities to stay engaged; however, the activities and tasks should not be goal directed. It may be difficult for an individual with dementia to understand the goal of an activity. Focus on the activity, not the outcome.

Research shows that a wide range of meaningful activities with appropriate set up may be useful for persons in the severe stage of dementia. Individuals with severe dementia are more likely to benefit from simple movement (physical activity) and manipulation/sensory/sorting activities more often than other types of activity. Activities should focus on simple steps of tasks that involve a sensory component to encourage their participation and provide enjoyable sensory stimulation for the individual.



**15 minutes**

APPROPRIATE AMOUNT  
OF TIME TO FOCUS

## Activity ideas for late-stage dementia:



### NATURE

- Enjoy being surrounded by nature. Try bird watching or sitting somewhere by the water in a shade.
- Play/explore dirt and smell flowers if they enjoyed gardening.



### MASSAGE

- Give them hand massages with their favorite lotion.
- Use a foot massager and turn on relaxing music.



### ART

- Turn on their favorite music/song and sing or just listen with them.
- Watch their favorite movies or TV shows with them.
- Try reading their favorite book with them.
- Looking at books or magazines with pictures is a great way to interact with them. Pick up a topic they enjoy and look through the pages together.
- Have them smell and taste food as it is prepared. Make a meal or snack they enjoy.



## ENCOURAGE SIMPLE MOVEMENT

### Examples of gentle physical activities are:

- ❑ Walking. If long walks are too difficult, make the activity easier by going on shorter walks several times a day.
- ❑ Using a pedal pusher
- ❑ Balancing exercises such as weight shifts
- ❑ Using a stationary bike
- ❑ Using a soft exercise ball for stretching
- ❑ Using light stretch bands
- ❑ Lifting light weights or household items such as soup cans
- ❑ Simple chores such as sweeping or dusting



## SENSORY

- > Scrunch colorful tissue paper. Make a game out of it by trying to have them throw it in a waste basket.
- > Stimulate touch by making a sensory bin or station within the home by using simple things like sand, jelly, flour, water beads, beans, and rice.

### Specific purposeful sensory bin ideas include:



#### GARDEN BOX:

Use herbs, seed packets, pebbles, and mini flower pots. Include small garden tools and gloves for them to improve their sensory experience and make the activity more purposeful.



#### JEWELRY BOX:

Use sparkly bracelets, rings, and necklaces to make a fun box for the fashionable.



#### MILITARY BOX:

If your loved one is a veteran, include dog tags, military medals, old pictures, and camouflage items in the bin.



#### SPORTS BOX:

Include hats, key chains, playing cards, and pictures or any other sport knick knacks that may help spark your loved one's memory.



#### VACATION BOX:

Use items such as sand, sea shells, pebbles, and pictures from trips they previously enjoyed.



During the late stage of dementia, just being present with your loved one is so important, even if they do not appear to be engaged. Keeping them company can be enough.



# Additional Helpful Tips:

## STRENGTHS

- ❑ Build on the individual's abilities and strengths to help them maintain functional abilities as long as possible.
- ❑ Consider their previous and current interests, preferences, and life history to make activities more meaningful for them.
- ❑ Give them tasks that match their level of competence. For severe stages of dementia, having them complete simple steps of a task that involve sensory stimulation is beneficial.

## INDEPENDENCE

- ❑ Provide structure or support for even simple tasks to help the individual stay engaged.

## CONNECTION

- ❑ Encourage them to socialize with family and friends.

## ROUTINE

- ❑ Having a daily routine provides structure and stability for the loved one with dementia. Plan activities for times during the day when your loved one typically functions at their best.
- ❑ If your loved one appears agitated, assess the situation. Is there excess stimuli in the environment? Is it late afternoon and they're exhausted? If they are not wanting to get involved, do not pressure them. Take a break and try again later or choose a different activity after they have had some time to calm down and rest.

## SIMPLIFY

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- ❑ Focus on the activity, not the outcome. Just enjoy the process and the moment.
- ❑ People with severe dementia respond best to familiar and comforting experiences/ stimuli in the environment. For additional environmental considerations, refer to the resource, *Environmental Modifications for Individuals with Dementia*.

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It is important to note that these activity ideas are just suggestions and a caregiver should focus on the individual's desires and needs to maximize their abilities, function, and quality of life.

Regardless of which stage of dementia a loved one is in, keeping your loved one engaged can help preserve their quality of life and slow down the progression of their disease. We hope you found this resource helpful and have new ideas for encouraging your loving one to engage in activities that are purposeful and meaningful to them!



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