



Sensory Stimulation

for Individuals with Dementia

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IN THIS PACKET:

- Why Use Sensory Stimulation?
- Benefits of Sensory Stimulation
- Multisensory Activities

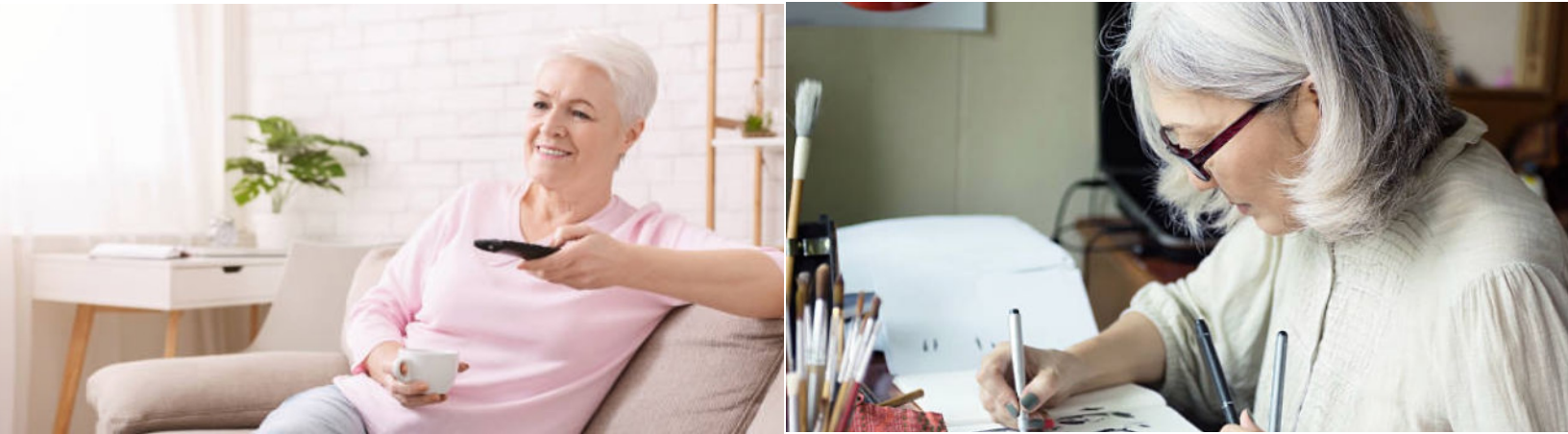
The word 'dementia' is a general term that describes progressive disorders affecting the brain such as Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, and Lewy body dementia. Dementia is a process of cognitive decline that affects a person's ability to cope with and adjust to their environment, interact with others, and meet their own needs. This cognitive decline specifically causes issues with thinking, perception, reasoning, and their ability to remember. In addition, these conditions can negatively impact one's mood, behavior, and their ability to take part in everyday activities.

People with dementia, especially those in the later stages of dementia, are limited in their ability to access appropriate sensory enrichment through meaningful activities. As people age, they can experience reduced acuity of vision, hearing, taste, and smell which can cause sensory deprivation. Deprivation of sensory-enhancing experiences and activities can cause feelings of isolation, frustration, boredom, and unhappiness. These barriers can reflect in individuals wandering or appearing emotionally distressed. Sensory stimulation is a great way to address a person's needs by incorporating activities that promote feelings of purpose. Finding ways to keep an individual with dementia engaged also enables them to remain active and supports them in maintaining everyday skills for longer.

● Why Use Sensory Stimulation?

Sensory stimulation is required for people to understand the world around them. We use our senses to send information to our brains so we can interpret the environment around us. Sensory stimulation is an approach that aims to reach individuals with dementia through sensory channels that are still intact. This includes using primary senses of vision, touch, hearing, smell, taste, and movement. Using these senses to interact with the environment requires using less higher cognitive function. Sensory stimulation is a great way for seniors with dementia to explore their environment in a safe, enjoyable, meaningful, and engaging way.

Sensory experiences can be used throughout someone's daily routine and through sensory enhancement of their environment. Stimuli from sensory experiences happen moment by moment and do not rely on short-term memory to link them to previous events. Everyday objects can be used to trigger memories and emotions in individuals who have more difficulty communicating with the world around them.



SENSORY STIMULATION



Reach individuals with dementia through sensory channels that are still intact

VISION



HEARING



TASTE



SMELL



Benefits of Sensory Stimulation?



There are several great benefits to using sensory stimulation with individuals who have dementia. There can be several senses that are stimulated at a given time. For example, if a loved one with dementia is outside helping plant flowers, there are several senses that go into this activity such as vision, touch, smell, movement, and hearing.

With this in mind, there is an appropriate amount of stimulation that should be provided within the environment and during daily activities. When we have too much stimulation, we can become easily overwhelmed. If we have too little stimulation, we lose interest in our surroundings and our ability to do things. It is important to provide the right level of sensory stimulation to help relieve stress and boredom.

Individuals who are limited in their physical and cognitive abilities may need help to engage in activities that provide sensory stimulation as they may not be able to access this type of beneficial stimulation on their own. If a loved one typically becomes easily overwhelmed, try to focus on incorporating one sense at a time when introducing an activity. This will allow you to stimulate a sensory response and give your loved one time to interpret how they feel about the sensory experience. If they respond well, try incorporating other senses within the activity. An example of this would be turning on calming music while they are completing a puzzle. Combining two or more senses during an activity are considered as multisensory activities



Improves behavior and mood



Promotes alertness



Increases brain function



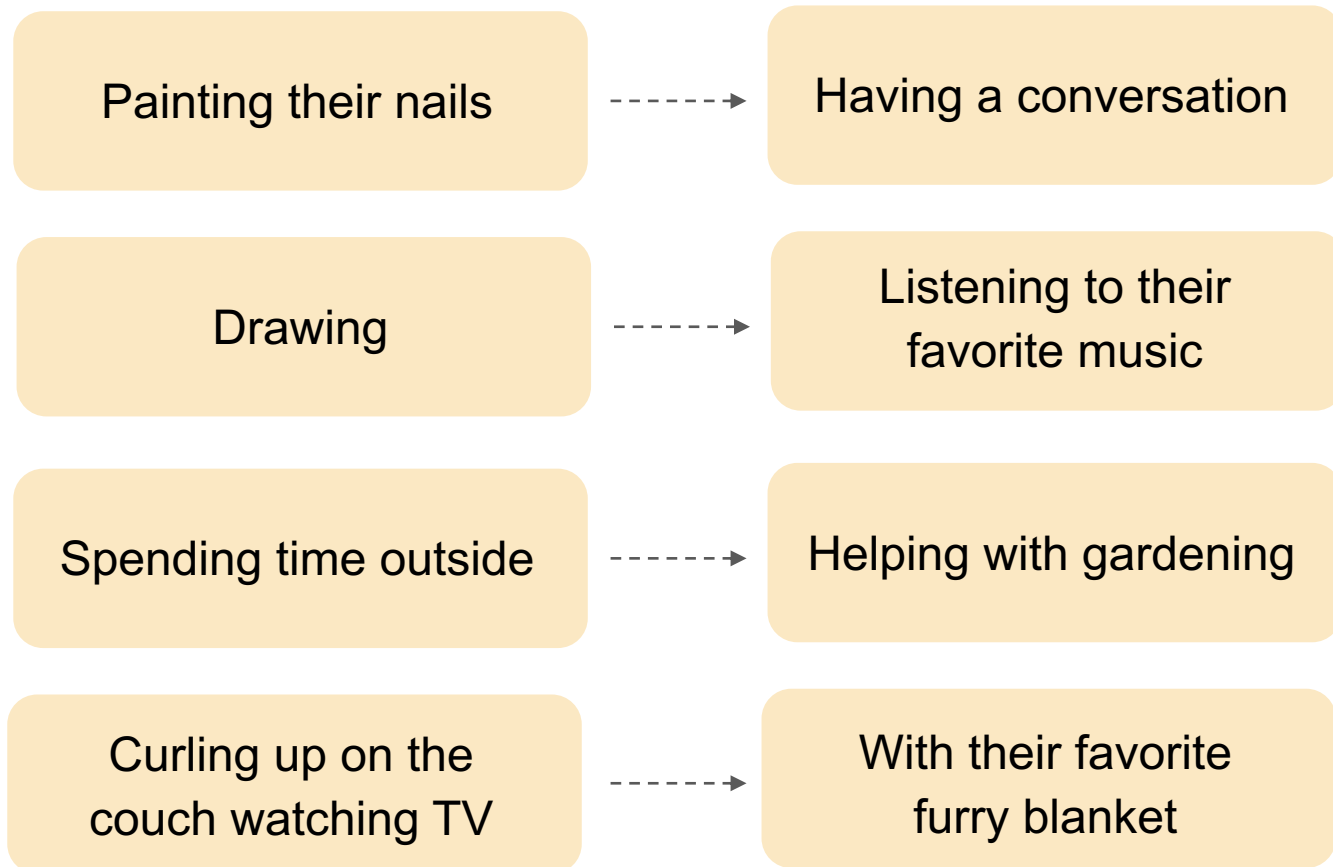
Improves communication



Boosts self-esteem and well-being

Multisensory Activities

Multisensory activities combine two or more senses at a given time. This could include activities such as:



Choosing the most appropriate type of activity for people, especially in the middle to late stages of the disease, can be challenging. It is important to remember to match activities to cognitive and functional capabilities, and relate them to previous roles, habits, and interests. Sensory stimulation through meaningful activity increases awareness and attention. Matching the sensory demand of an activity with a well-designed environment will help a person with dementia participate in meaningful activities.

For more information about activity ideas for individuals with dementia, please see the resource, *Activities for Seniors with Dementia*.

For suggestions on how to set up the home environment for your loved one, please review the resource, *Environmental Modifications for Individuals with Dementia*.

Sources

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