

ACTIVITIES GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

When people with dementia engage in stimulating and enjoyable activities, there are clear benefits to health and wellbeing.

Doing activities is a good way to stimulate our brains. It can also make the day more enjoyable – and mean we are less likely to get anxious or bored.

This handout has been written as a guide for people with dementia and their families and carers. It includes activities that people with dementia may want to try at home. These are based on our Cognitive Stimulation Therapy course.

The activity ideas are grouped by theme. You might want to try a different theme each day or week, or mix them up.

Some people with dementia may need the support of carers or family members to make the most of these ideas. If you are helping someone to try these activities, please adapt the activities and level of support you provide to suit the person you are working with.

Finding the right level of difficulty is really important for people with a dementia diagnosis. So please pay attention to how difficult you (or the person you are supporting) are finding an activity.

If something is too easy, it may become boring. But if it's too difficult it can lead to frustration or feeling demoralised. The aim is to find activities that are “just challenging enough” so that they are stimulating, but not stressful.

Other good sources of activities include:

- **The Daily Sparkle** – a reminiscence newspaper that provides daily stimulation, interest, enjoyment and fun people living with dementia. You can sign up for a free 8-week trial here: <https://www.dailysparkle.co.uk>.
- **The Health Innovation Network** has put together a useful guide to online activity resources for people with dementia: <https://healthinnovationnetwork.com/healthy-ageing/maintaining-activities-for-older-adults-during-covid19/> (or search online for “Maintaining Activities for Older Adults During Covid-19”)

Share your ideas and feedback!

We plan to keep updating this document and we'd love to include your ideas too! If you have feedback or suggestions please contact us:

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1. Physical Games

Physical activities are a great way to stimulate the mind and body simultaneously. Try to include some physical exercises in each day where possible. For example:

- In the morning, stand up carefully and gently roll your shoulders forward 10 times and backwards 10 times.
- Stretch your arms to the ceiling when watching TV.
- Go for a walk (while following guidance on social distancing – currently to stay at least 2 metres away from other people.)
- Do some gardening
- Play physical games, eg catch, hopscotch, skittles, darts – whatever you have at home!

2. Sounds

Music and sounds can have a lot of memories attached to them. Here are some ideas to for enjoying sounds at home:

- Play the radio while you are doing household chores.
- Play sounds or songs that remind you of things from the past. If you can, talk to a relative or friend about your memories. The BBC has a free Music Memories website, designed for people with dementia: <https://musicmemories.bbcrewind.co.uk/>
- Listen to songs and try to name the song and the singer, or what instruments are playing.
- Tune into your surroundings! Sit outside or near an open window. Close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you. Can you identify each sound? If you are supporting someone with this task, ask them about what they can see and hear – the idea is to help them tune in to different sensory experiences, but it doesn't matter whether the answers are right or wrong.
- 'Playlist for Life' is a website that allows you to create personal playlists to explore people's life stories and connect with others <https://www.playlistforlife.org.uk/>
- Sing along with a favourite song or music video.

3. Reminiscing

Reminiscing about by-gone days can be enjoyable and help communication. The idea is to see what comes to mind about a particular time or topic. It's not a test of memory accuracy, so please don't worry if you can't remember particular details. The important thing is the different associations and experiences that come to mind.

You could try the following exercises by yourself or with a friend or relative:

- Looking at family photos. What memories or associations come up for you?
- Looking at photos, film or audio clips from the era when you grew up. Try YouTube or the BBC Reminiscence Archive: <https://remarc.bbcrewind.co.uk/index.html>

- Watching one of your favourite old films. What do you like about it?
- Create a family or memory – the application ‘My House of Memories’ contains a range of pictures of objects that can be saved to create a memory tree or timeline

For some people reminiscing may be difficult or frustrating. If you are having trouble recalling things, try discussing your opinions about the topic, e.g. “what are the people in this photograph doing?” Or “were things harder or easier back in those days?”

4. Food

Food is something many people have an opinion about! Here are a few ways to explore the topic:

- Make a favourite meal with somebody and talk about what you like about it or the different associations that come to mind.
- Try a new food together. What’s it like? Did you enjoy it?
- Make a list of favourite foods and try to describe what they taste like.
- Decorate a cake. If you are caring for someone with dementia, can you work on preparing some food together?
- Talk to a friend or relative about national cuisines – what do you each like or dislike about food from different countries?
- Write a list of different countries and draw or write the food you associate with each country. Which foods are your favourites?

5. Current Affairs

Discussing current affairs can be a great way to engage with the present. If you enjoy the news, try talking about it with somebody else. Some questions that might spark debate are:

- What is Coronavirus?
- Who is your favourite person in the Royal Family?
- What do you wish wasn’t invented?
- What do you think of the NHS?
- What’s your advice to young people today?
- What’s your favourite drama on TV?

It also might be the case that you find the news upsetting and prefer not to spend too much time thinking about it. Here are some other ways to connect with the world around you:

- Keep a diary and add an entry each day about what’s been going on.
- You could even contribute to the historical record by taking part in the Mass Observation diary project: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/>
- Think about the month and the season. What associations and memories are there of this time of year? Do you notice any changes outside, eg blossom?
- Try recording what can be seen about the changing seasons in a nature diary.

- Buy a calendar and mark on it family and friend's birthdays or other events that are meaningful for you. Check this each day to remind yourself of what is going on. If you like being creative, you could draw the calendar yourself.

6. Faces and scenes

Pictures of famous people can trigger lots of memories and discussion. For example, a picture of John F Kennedy may trigger a memory of what you were doing when you heard about his assassination. It's ok if you can't name the person or place in a picture – you can still say what you think about it! Here are some ideas to try:

- Cut out or print some pictures of famous people and places. When you have a few, look at them and see what kind of discussions come up. What comes to mind looking at each image? What do the people/places have in common? How are they different?
- Put the pictures of people into categories according to what they are famous for, eg politicians, royal family, sports, music, associated.
- Look up the street or town where you grew up (or a favourite place) on Google Maps 'street view'. What do you recognise and what has changed?
- Look at local scenes from the past and the present. What has changed? You can find old footage of Haringey and other parts of London for free online at the London Screen Archives: <https://www.londonsscreenarchives.org.uk/browse/>

7. Word association

Sometimes people with dementia struggle to find the word they're looking for. Finishing sentences or phrases can be a helpful way of stimulating recall. If you are supporting someone with dementia, try to notice whether it helps prompt memory if you give the first half of a saying or phrase. It can make an enjoyable word game for two people.

Here are some phrases that you can complete to help with recall of words (in writing or talking). There can be more than one answer!

Pairs:

Pair of...	Bacon and...
Fork and....	Bread and...
Saturday and...	Tea and....
Cops and...	Fish and...

Sayings:

Better late than...	Look before you...
A cat has nine....	Strike while the iron is...
A bad workman blames his....	Twinkle twinkle...
All that glitters...	A stich in time...
A bird in the hand...	Make hay...

Similes

As proud as a...	As pretty as a....
As safe as....	As fresh as a...
As sober as a...	As good as...
As dry as a...	As right as...

Quantities

A jar of...	A bowl of...
A spoonful of...	A cup of...
A bag of...	A pint of...
A bottle of...	A carton of...

You could also spend some time thinking (or talking) about what you associate with the words and sayings above. What do you think they mean? Where do you think they come from?

8. Get creative

Creative activities can exercise skills that have not been used for a while. For example, making a cake uses skills such as planning and organising various stages of a task. Here are some ideas to try. If you are a carer for someone with dementia these could be tasks to work on together, adjusting who does what in the task to the right level of difficulty

- Cookery
- Drawing or painting – people, natural objects, imaginary scenes...
- Making cards to send friends and family that you're missing

- Putting together a photo album
- Lego or doing a puzzle
- Making a montage by cutting out pictures from the newspaper
- Sewing or knitting
- Flower arranging
- Colouring in. A range of websites offer free printable resources, eg:
<https://www.crayola.com/featured/free-coloring-pages/>

9. Categorising objects & household chores

Putting objects and words into different categories or groups is a way of using skills such as mental organisation. Try incorporating this into household chores, for example:

- Putting away the shopping – which objects belong in which room / place?
- Generating a shopping list by category of room/activity – what items do you need for cleaning? What foods for breakfast/dinner? What desserts? What kind of drinks?
- Sorting clothes for washing, eg whites, colours, darks, hot wash / cold wash...
- Sorting and folding clean clothes – which clothes belong to which person? Or if that's too difficult, you could separate out a particular kind of item, such as towels, and fold them.

If you are supporting someone with dementia, see how these activities can be done together. It can be very important to some people to feel like they have a useful job to do and that they can contribute to the household, even if the tasks they do need to be adjusted.

10. Orientation & maps

Looking at maps can be good for remembering stories of holidays and journeys made in our past. It can also help orientate us to where we are in the present. Here are some activities to try at home:

- Bring out maps of favourite walks or places the person you have visited, or look them up online. What comes to mind when you look at them?
- Print a blank map of the world and see how many countries you can label.
- Print a map of the local area (or bring it up on Google Maps) – can you navigate to local landmarks, e.g. the local shop, the GP's surgery, the Post Office?
- Look at a tube or bus map and work out how to get from your local stop to somewhere else. Start with routes you know well, e.g. how get to your old workplace.

11. Using money

Talking about money can involve cognitive skills like calculation and comparing values. It can also be a great way to stimulate debate. Here are some activities to try:

- Look at a local estate agent's window or at a property site online. What does the do you think about house prices in London?
- When you're doing your shopping (online or in person), try to estimate how much the total will be before you get to the checkout. If somebody else does your shopping, ask if you can help them.
- Collect all the loose change you can find lying around the house and see how much there is altogether.
- How would you spend your money if you won the lottery? Write down a list of things you would buy or do – or talk to a friend about it.
- If you live with other people, ask them to play a game of Monopoly. Or you could offer to act as the banker for the game.

12. Number games

Playing games that involve numbers can be another great way of exercising the brain because we have to make calculations in our head. Below are some suggestions of games to play at home. You could have a games night or set a regular time to play a favourite game.

If you are supporting someone with dementia, remember the most important thing is joining in and having fun, rather than what score you get!

- Dominoes
- Solitaire
- Bridge
- Snap

13. Word games

Activities involving word games can help stimulate language. Here are some ideas that you can do by yourself or with other people.

- Word search. You can find free ones online, eg: <https://thewordsearch.com/>
- Crosswords – there are a range of options online with different levels of difficulty. If you have trouble with words, you ask somebody to print you crossword that gives the clues in pictures, eg: <https://www.puzzles-to-print.com/crossword-puzzles-for-kids/>
- Hangman – try doing this by theme (e.g. 'films about animals; 'types of fruit') to help the person with dementia generate ideas.
- You can also make your own puzzles online: <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com>