

## HELPING THE ALZHEIMER SUFFERER TO ORGANISE THEIR DAY - by the Alzheimer's Association of America

(A practical guide for caregivers in planning activities for the person with Alzheimer's disease)

Activities are the "things that we do." These include getting dressed, doing ordinary household chores, doing the things that we enjoy doing, like playing cards or sewing or other hobbies and even paying bills. They can represent who we are and what we're about.

Activities can be active or passive, done alone or in the company of others. They enhance a person's sense of dignity and self-esteem by giving purpose and meaning to their life.

Activities structure time and can make the best of retained and exiting abilities.

Activities can help to lessen undesirable behaviour such as wandering or agitation

Activities provide the person with dementia and the caregiver a sense of security, stability, fun, and togetherness.

Activities take on many forms and represent different facets of our lives:

Daily Routines:

Personal care activities:	bathing, shaving and dressing.
Mealtime Activities:	preparing food, cooking and eating.
Chores:	dusting, washing dishes and doing laundry.

Other activities:

Physical:	taking a walk or playing ball.
Social:	having coffee, talking, or playing cards.
Intellectual:	reading a book or doing a crossword puzzle.
Spiritual:	praying or singing a hymn.
Creative:	painting or playing the piano or embroidering.
Work related:	making notes, typing or fixing something.
Spontaneous:	going out to dinner or visiting friends.

When planning activities, think about;

- The Person
- The Activity
- Your Approach
- The Environment

### 1. The Person

Planning activities for the person with Alzheimer's disease involves continual exploration, experimentation, and adjustment. Consider the person's likes and dislikes, strengths and abilities, and past interests. As the disease progresses, keep activities flexible and be prepared to make adjustments. Consider the following:

#### **What skills and abilities does the person still have?**

The person with Alzheimer's may be able to play simple songs learned on the piano years ago. Incorporate maintained skills into daily activities.

#### **What does the person enjoy?**

Note when the person seems happy, anxious, distracted or irritable. Some people with Alzheimer's may enjoy watching sports, while others may be frightened by the fast pace or noise.

#### **Does the person begin activities without direction?**

Does the person set the table before dinner or begin sweeping the kitchen floor mid-morning? If so, you may wish to draw upon these types of activities at other times of the day.

#### **Does the person have physical problems?**

Does the person tire quickly, have difficulty seeing, hearing or performing simple movements? If so you may want to avoid certain activities.

## **2. The Activity**

### **Make activities part of your daily routine.**

Asking the person with Alzheimer's to help you complete a task - like folding towels - may provide him/her with a sense of purpose and importance.

### **Focus on enjoyment, not achievement.**

Find activities that build on remaining skills and talents. A professional artist might become frustrated over the declining quality of work, but an amateur might enjoy a new opportunity for self-expression.

### **Stress involvement.**

Activities that help the individual feel like a valued part of the household - like setting the table, wiping countertops, or emptying wastebaskets - provide a sense of success and accomplishment.

### Relate activity to work life.

A business person might enjoy organisation activities such as putting coins in a holder, or making a “to do” list. A farmer or gardener would probably enjoy working in the garden.

### Look for favourites.

The person who always enjoyed drinking coffee and reading the newspaper may still find that activity enjoyable, even if he/she is not able to completely comprehend what they are reading.

### Modify activities as needed.

Try to be flexible and acknowledge the person’s changing interests and abilities.

### Consider the time of day.

Many caregivers find they have more success with certain activities such as bathing and dressing in the morning. Whatever the case, your typical daily routine may need to change somewhat.

### Adjust activities to stages of the disease.

As the disease progresses, you may want to introduce more repetitive tasks or even expect the person to take a less active role in activities.

## 3. Your Approach

### Offer support and supervision.

You may need to show the person how to perform the activity and provide simple step-by-step directions.

### Concentrate on the process, not the end product.

Does it really matter if the towels are folded properly? Not really. What matters is that you were able to spend time together and the person with Alzheimer’s feels as if he/she has helped do something useful.

### Be flexible.

When he/she insists that they don’t want to do something, they might be telling you that they can’t do it or fear doing it. Or if they insist doing it a different way, let it happen and fix it later.

### Be realistic and relaxed.

Don't be concerned about filling every minute of the day with an activity. The person with Alzheimer's needs a balance of activity and rest, and may need more frequent breaks and varied tasks.

### Help get the activity started.

Most people with Alzheimer's still have the energy and desire to do things, but lack the ability to organize, plan, initiate, and successfully complete the task.

### Break activities into simple, easy to follow steps.

Too many directions at once often overwhelm a person with dementia. Focus on one task at a time

### Assist with difficult parts of the task.

If you're cooking, and the person can't measure the ingredients, finish the measuring and say, "Would you please stir this for me?"

### Let them know they are needed.

Ask, "Could you please help me?" be careful, however, not to place too many demands upon the person.

### Stress a sense of purpose.

If you ask the person to make a card, they may not respond. But, if you tell them that you're sending a special get-well card to a friend, they may enjoy working on this task with you.

### Don't criticise or correct.

If the person with Alzheimer's finds a harmless activity that seems significant or meaningful, encourage them to continue.

### Encourage self-expression.

Include activities that allow the person a chance to express themselves. 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, they are likely to benefit from your communication.

### Substitute an activity for a behaviour.

If a person with dementia rubs their hands on a table, place a cloth in their hands and encourage them to wipe the table, or if a person is moving their feet on the floor, play some music so they can tap them to the beat.

### Try again later.

If something isn't working, it may be the wrong time of day or the activity may be too complicated. Try again later or adapt the activity.

## 4. The Environment

### Make activities safe.

Modify a workshop by removing toxic materials and dangerous tools so an activity such as sanding a piece of wood can be safe and pleasurable.

### Change your surroundings to encourage activities.

Leave out scrapbooks, photo albums or old magazines that help the person with Alzheimer's reminisce.

### Minimize distractions that can frighten or confuse.

The person with Alzheimer's may not be able to recall familiar sounds and places, and may become frightened or may simply feel uncomfortable in certain settings.

### Making a Plan: Structuring the Day

When planning the day for the person with Alzheimer's, think about how you organise your own day.

There are times when you want variety and other times when you welcome routine. The challenge for caregivers is to find activities that provide meaning and purpose, as well as pleasure.

Begin by thinking about the past week. Make notes about activities and experiences that worked and didn't work. Try keeping a daily journal and ask yourself the following questions:

- Which activities worked best and which didn't? Why?
- Were there times when there was too much going on or too little to do?
- Were spontaneous activities enjoyable and easily completed?

Set up a written schedule based on your journal. A planned day allows you to spend less time and energy trying to work out what to do from moment to moment. Allow yourself and the person with dementia some flexibility for spontaneous activities.

When structuring the day, consider the following examples for activities:

### Morning Activities:

- Wash, brush teeth, get dressed
- Prepare and eat breakfast
- Coffee and conversation
- Discuss newspaper, participate in a hobby, or reminisce about old photos
- Take a break or have some quiet time
- Do some chores together
- Take a walk or play an active game

### Afternoon Activities:

- Prepare and eat lunch, read mail, clear and wash dishes
- Listen to music, do a crossword puzzle, or watch television
- Do some gardening, take a walk, or visit a neighbour
- Take a short break or nap

### Evening Activities:

- Prepare and eat dinner and clean up the kitchen
- Reminisce over coffee and dessert
- Play cards, watch a movie, or give a massage
- Take a bath, get ready for bed, read a book, or look through a magazine

### Evaluating your Plan: Determining Which Activities Work

In evaluating the success of an activity, look at how well the person with Alzheimer's responds and how well the activity meets your needs.

The success of an activity can vary from day to day. In general, if the person seems bored, distracted or irritable, it may be time to introduce another activity or to take time out for rest.

In most cases, structured pleasant activities decrease agitation and improve mood. The nature of the activity and the degree to which the person completes it successfully are not as important as the pleasure and sense of accomplishment the person derives from it.

### Tips for planning activities:

- Choose activities that bring meaning, purpose, joy and hope to the person's life
- Select activities that use the retained skills and abilities of the person with dementia.
- Pick activities that help normalise the person's life.
- Choose activities that can involve family and friends.
- Look for activities that are dignified and appropriate for adults.
- Focus on activities that are enjoyable.

- Select activities where the process is more important than the final product.

**Tips for your approach:**

- Be flexible.
- Avoid correcting the person.
- Stress involvement.
- Be patient.
- Help the person remain as independent as possible.
- Offer opportunities for choice
- Simplify instructions.
- Establish a familiar routine.
- Respond to the person's feelings.
- Provide encouragement and praise.
- Simplify, structure and supervise.