



The activities handbook

Supporting someone with dementia to stay active and involved

For more information
alzheimers.org.uk
0333 150 3456





About this handbook

When you're supporting or spending time with a person with dementia, you may wonder what might help them to live well however their dementia affects them. Activities can provide ways for someone to carry on being the person they are.

Taking part in activities, including everyday tasks, can have powerful benefits for the physical and mental wellbeing of a person with dementia. Activities can help them stay healthy, active and independent. They can also help someone express their feelings, retain their skills and self-esteem, and stay motivated.

Activities can also be an opportunity for carers and people with dementia to do things together and to connect with each other.

This handbook is for anyone who's caring for a person with dementia. It will help you suggest activities that the person you're caring for may enjoy. It may also help people with dementia who are looking for activities they can try.

This handbook has themed sections to help you find activities that match a person's interests and abilities:



Social, physical and outdoor activities



Activities at home



Online and digital activities

There is lots of crossover between these sections. For example, many activities that people enjoy at home can be done online, such as listening to music. The handbook includes pointers to help you find related activities in different sections. You can also use the index at the end of the handbook to find specific activities.

You can use this handbook to spark ideas and come up with your own activities to do with the person. The handbook is just a starting point, and the possibilities are endless.

Other carers can also be a great source of ideas about activities and ways to adapt them. Connect with other carers by joining Alzheimer's Society's Talking Point at alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint. This online community is free and available 24 hours a day, every day. You can also use the dementia directory to search for dementia-friendly groups and social activities in your local area at alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirctory

For more information and advice on wider aspects of caring see **booklet 600, Caring for a person with dementia: A practical guide**. You will also find lots of information for carers on our website at alzheimers.org.uk

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A photograph of a person sitting on a couch, partially visible on the left side of the frame. The person is wearing a blue top and a brown bracelet. In the background, there is a window with a view of green foliage outside. The overall scene is bright and natural.

1

Focus on the person

When thinking about activities, the most important factor is the person. They have their own personality, likes and interests. Dementia affects every person differently, and activities may need to be adapted as their condition progresses, so that they can continue doing what they enjoy. You can always try new or different kinds of activities. Keep an open mind as to how to make these possible.

1

Choosing activities

An activity could be anything that the person finds enjoyable or meaningful for them. It doesn't have to be structured or complicated. Many people enjoy activities that are easy to do at home and don't need a lot of planning or equipment.

Choose activities that match the person's interests and give them the opportunity to enjoy and express themselves. If they don't want to join a group, they may enjoy doing an activity at home or online instead. If they don't enjoy playing games they might enjoy something quieter or less structured – such as a creative activity.

If the person you're caring for has another condition or disability it may affect how much they enjoy certain activities. Do they have difficulty with their balance, hearing or eyesight? If so, try to choose activities to match their abilities.

Someone with dementia will find things more difficult as their condition progresses. Their ability to do some activities may change. You may need to suggest a new but related activity if what you've planned doesn't go well.



This might be because the person doesn't seem engaged, or gets frustrated that they can't now do something as well or as easily as before. Look for the listed suggestions between related activities in the booklet to help you find an alternative.

In the later stages of dementia, people may find it more difficult to process information or communicate using words. Their experience of the world may increasingly come from other things. So it's useful to think more broadly about 'activities' to include other ways that help a person interact and be engaged. This includes ways of stimulating different senses such as using aromatherapy or cooking (smell), handling objects (touch) and listening to music (hearing).

1



Tips for choosing activities



Encourage the person to choose and help you prepare the activity. Offer a few suggestions – be aware that the person may find too much choice overwhelming.



Remember the person's likes, preferences and interests.



Focus on the person's strengths and abilities rather than things they can't do.



Be flexible – suggest activities you can adapt to match their changing abilities and moods.

Helping a person with dementia enjoy activities

1

- Choose the right time of day – when the person is most alert.
- Make sure they are comfortable.
- Keep things simple – break down activities into straightforward steps.
- Be prepared to adapt or simplify the activity as you go.
- Give the person lots of support, praise and encouragement.
- Aim to do an activity with, rather than for, the person. If you take over it could make them lose confidence and withdraw from the activity.
- Watch for signs that they want to finish or do a different activity. For example, they may start to fidget, avoid eye contact or become irritable.
- Don't feel you have to finish every activity – you can pick up where you left off another day if the person would like to stop.



You can also help the person keep doing activities they enjoy as their condition progresses:

- Offer them more support and try to adjust activities to match their abilities. See the tips throughout this booklet for ideas about how to do this.
- Keep a list of activities the person has enjoyed and any adaptations they found helpful – this can help you plan as their needs and abilities change.
- Focus on the process of doing the activity rather than the end goal. As dementia worsens, someone might become more interested or get more enjoyment from the process than the end result.







2

Social, physical and outdoor activities

Groups and clubs

People with dementia can often feel cut off from other people. They have a higher risk of being socially isolated and lonely, which can lead to them becoming depressed. The opportunity to be sociable is very important for a person's wellbeing and self-esteem. Group activities are a great way for people to socialise, try new things and have fun. They may also help someone retain language skills for longer.

Book clubs

Joining a book club can be a great way to meet people who have a similar interest. The Reading Agency's network of Reading Groups for Everyone can help you find a local book club. See also 'Reading' on page 30.

Memory cafés

Memory cafés give people with dementia and carers a chance to make new friends, share experiences and get advice from their peers. Many memory cafés also arrange activities and talks.

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Dementia-friendly groups

Many sports clubs have dementia-friendly groups, including football, golf or rugby. You can look for dementia-friendly clubs and groups in the local area by using Alzheimer's Society's online dementia directory – alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory



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Helping someone enjoy book club meetings

Members of the book club can support the person by:

- discussing photography books, such as on astronomy, travel or landmarks
- reading or reciting poetry
- having one person read aloud to the group.

Dance groups

Dance groups give people a chance to engage with music and express themselves physically. This can be particularly positive for people who find it difficult to communicate verbally. Dancing is also good exercise. It can improve a person's balance, strength and agility. If someone is less mobile, they may enjoy dancing in a seated position or tapping their feet.

Singing groups

People with dementia can socialise while singing by joining a singing group. For example, at Singing for the Brain®, each group develops its own repertoire of songs, including those from different eras, styles and cultures. The sessions are led by a facilitator. People with dementia can attend alone or with a carer.

To find out more, go to [alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/your-support-services/singing-for-the-brain](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/your-support-services/singing-for-the-brain)

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‘I take my wife to “Singing for the brain” and “Musical memories” sessions. She sings for England – she loves it and I love to see her happy.’

Carer for a person with dementia

More group activities

- drama groups
- arts, crafts, painting and drawing groups or classes
- nature and natural history groups – see ‘Spending time outdoors’ on page 22
- walking groups – see ‘Walking’ on page 19
- sports clubs – see ‘Physical activities’ on page 17
- choirs and music groups – see ideas about doing musical activities at home on page 38 and online on page 60.





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Helping someone enjoy a social or group activity

If a person prefers socialising with people they already know, they may enjoy regular visits to see friends and family.

Physical activities

Physical activities are good for both mental and physical health. Moving more can help people maintain their strength and balance. This can reduce their risk of falling and help them stay independent for longer. Being physically active during the day can help the person sleep at night and feel less restless or agitated.



For more information see factsheet 529, **Physical activity and exercise** and booklet 1506, **Keeping active and involved**.

Bowls

If a person enjoys playing bowls but they don't feel confident to join a club, they may enjoy playing bowls in a garden or park instead. You can buy a set of bowls from a sports shop. Or they could play indoor bowls or skittles. Some local leisure centres run indoor bowls sessions.

Swimming

Swimming is great exercise. It has a low impact on a person's bones and joints. Many people also feel calm in water. Some leisure centres and public pools run dementia-friendly swimming sessions. This can include in-pool guidance and wider lanes to help people with dementia enjoy being in the water.

Tai chi/qigong

These gentle forms of Chinese martial arts combine simple physical movements and meditation. They can improve a person's balance and health. Tai chi and qigong both focus on balance and stability, which can help people stay agile and reduce the risk of falls.



For more help and advice call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**



2



Helping someone enjoy a physical activity

As a person's condition progresses, they can still enjoy doing physical activities. Instead of going for a long walk they could walk around a garden or park. If they enjoy football, they may like to play walking or beanbag football.

Walking

Walking is free and can be done almost anywhere. If the person you're caring for enjoys walking, maybe they could do a regular walk each week? They could walk to the shops or around a park. Make sure they wear appropriate clothing. You could suggest they take a snack or packed lunch.

Some organisations, such as Walking for Health, run walking events for people with dementia and carers. Walks can vary in length and many are supported by a walk leader. Find out whether there are walks in your area.

If someone is less mobile, they can still benefit from walking around the house or in the garden for short distances, or being taken out in their wheelchair.

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Take part in Memory Walk

Take part in Alzheimer's Society's annual Memory Walk to get moving and help to raise money to defeat dementia. The sponsored walks are spread across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Find a walk near you – memorywalk.org.uk



Chair aerobics

Chair aerobics can help people build or maintain their muscle strength and balance. It is less strenuous to exercise while sitting down than in a standing position. People can do seated exercises as part of a group or on their own at home.

Seated exercises can include:

- marching with your feet
- cycling your legs
- making circles with your arms
- moving from sitting to standing.



For more information and examples see factsheet 529, **Physical activity and exercise.**

Yoga/Pilates

Doing yoga or Pilates can make people feel less stressed and help them stay strong and supple. Classes can include poses that are adapted to suit people with age-related conditions, including arthritis and dementia. Find out whether there is a dementia-friendly yoga or Pilates class in your local area.



More physical activities

- table tennis
- badminton
- catch – you could use a ball, beanbag or balloon
- golf
- snooker or pool
- walking football
- tennis
- cycling – choose a short and familiar route in your local area
- running – for example, the charity parkrun organises free, inclusive local runs
- visit a gym – some run dementia-friendly open days
- dancing – see ‘Dance groups’ on page 14
- Wii games – see ‘Digital games’ on page 59.



Spending time outdoors

Spending time outside can improve a person's wellbeing and help them feel less stressed. Outdoor activities give people the chance to be in contact with nature – plants, sunshine, birds and animals. They can use their senses – smelling flowers, feeling leaves, watching wildlife and listening to birdsong. Spending 10–15 minutes in the sun each day can also help a person's body produce more vitamin D. This helps to keep their bones healthy.

Gardening

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Gardening has many physical benefits. Activities like digging and sweeping a path can boost oxygen levels and help a person maintain their co-ordination, balance and stamina. If the person likes gardening they may enjoy mowing the lawn, watering plants, planting seeds, weeding, pruning and painting garden fences. They could keep a gardening diary.

Gardens also give people a place to relax and reminisce. Encourage the person to sit in the garden and take time to relax. They may enjoy listening to wind chimes or watching birds, wildlife or a water feature. Focusing on things in the moment can help with stress.

If the person doesn't have a garden they could visit a public or community garden. They may also enjoy indoor gardening – planting a window box, taking care of a house plant or growing herbs on a windowsill.





Helping someone enjoy gardening

Make sure the garden has handrails along any paths, no trip hazards and places where the person can sit and rest. Also make sure the person has safe equipment and suitable clothing. In summer make sure they are wearing sun cream and a sun hat.

The Royal Horticultural Society website has a wide range of gardening tips, including a beginner's guide to gardening.

Going shopping

The person you're caring for may enjoy visiting local shops, a shopping centre or a garden centre. You could encourage them to help you make a shopping list, or just go to browse. Take breaks while you shop – relax with a tea or coffee in a café. If the person finds it overwhelming to visit the shops, they may prefer to browse and shop online. For more ideas around internet shopping see [section 4, 'Online and digital activities'](#).

Visiting a nature or heritage site

Many people enjoy visiting a nature centre or heritage place of interest. The National Trust allows visitors to bring carers with them free of charge.

Watching sport

Going to a sporting event can give people a chance to enjoy the atmosphere and be part of a crowd. If the person you are caring for finds large events overwhelming, they may prefer to go to a quieter local football, cricket, tennis or rugby match.

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More outdoor activities

- go for a walk – see [‘Walking’ on page 19](#)
- visit a park or the beach
- have a picnic
- visit a boating lake or go on a boat trip
- feed the ducks
- fly a kite
- go fishing
- go for a drive – perhaps in the area where the person grew up
- go birdwatching – for related activities people can do at home see [‘Watching birds’ on page 31](#).

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‘My other half and I have taken up birdwatching. There is a nature reserve near us. We have a look round, sit in the hides and watch the birds and then go and have a cup of coffee or lunch. It’s not something that my other half would ever have done before, but he seems to like it.’

Carer for a person with dementia



Places to visit

Many people enjoy going to public places where they can meet and be among people informally. Many, such as those below, run dementia-friendly events that can make it easier and more enjoyable for people with dementia to visit. Keep a look out locally for these. Examples of places to visit include:

- museums, art galleries and libraries
- theatres, cinemas and arts centres
- cafés and pubs
- places of worship
- zoos and farms.

Some organisations offer a ‘carer’s card’ that gives you free entry or a discount if you accompany the person. If the person you are caring for feels overwhelmed by large groups or busy places, find out when there are likely to be fewer people around.



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Activities at home

Keeping connected

For someone with dementia, their world can sometimes begin to feel smaller. However, there are activities a person can do at home that offer ways for them to experience the wider world. Many of these activities don't need a lot of planning or equipment. Encourage the person to do activities at home that they find enjoyable and relaxing. This might also give you time to get on with things you need or want to do, or just have a well-earned rest.

Reading

The Reading Agency has a resource called Reading Well Books on Prescription. This is a list of books for people with dementia that are available for free through public libraries.

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If the person has accessibility needs, they could use ebooks, audiobooks, or large print or Easy Read versions of books. If the person finds it harder to read as their dementia progresses, they could look at a picture book. Or they may enjoy reading a newspaper or magazine. Find a magazine on a topic they are interested in. For related activities see 'Book clubs' on page 12.



Dementia together magazine

Alzheimer's Society's **Dementia together magazine** is a great read for anyone affected by dementia. It comes out every two months and features real-life stories, news and ideas – alzheimers.org.uk/magazine

Watching television

Freeview and paid-for channels mean there is lots of choice for someone to watch regular programmes or films they like. Select the shows that the person is particularly interested in rather than leaving the TV on for several hours. Programmes without long storylines can be helpful, so that the person won't need to keep track of what is happening to be able to enjoy them. For example, they could watch a comedy sketch show, a funny home video show or a documentary on a favourite topic.

Watching birds

Buy a selection of seeds and food so the person can fill bird feeders. Hang them where the person can see them from a window. Make sure the person has somewhere comfortable to sit while they watch the birds.

If the person enjoys watching birds but they are less able to do this outdoors, they may enjoy listening to birdsong on a CD or online. Or they may like to look at pictures of birds in a book or on Instagram. For more ideas about using social media and doing activities online see [section 4, 'Online and digital activities'](#).

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'My dad takes a real pleasure in just being able to look out in the garden at the birds.'

Daughter of a person with dementia

Animals and pets

Some people with dementia may enjoy spending time with a pet – for example, walking a dog or stroking a cat. Animals can be a source of stress relief and companionship. If the person is living alone and unable to care for a pet themselves, they may enjoy visits from a friend's or family member's pet. Some care homes may arrange visits from a range of animals such as cats, dogs, donkeys or even birds of prey.

Dolls, toys and models

Some people, particularly those in the later stages of dementia, may enjoy holding or 'caring for' a doll or a toy animal. This can include cleaning it or washing its clothes. These objects can help to relieve boredom or agitation and can make people feel calmer. Looking after a doll or toy animal can also inspire feelings of love and connection, and help someone feel a sense of purpose and fulfilment. If you think the person you're caring for would enjoy holding a doll or toy animal, think carefully about what type is best. Think about its colour, feel and features like opening and closing eyes. For example, a doll with closed eyes may look asleep to one person but seem unresponsive to another. The person should choose the doll or animal rather than having it selected for them.

Some people enjoy arranging and displaying models or figurines. This can be especially meaningful if they're connected to a job the person did in the past, such as a farmyard or garage scene. They may enjoy recreating tasks they used to do at work. Or they may enjoy models related to a hobby or interest such as aeroplanes.



More activities at home

- seated exercises – see ‘Chair aerobics’ on page 20
- reading aloud
- listening to the radio or to someone telling a story
- cleaning and organising a toolbox.

For more ideas about keeping connected at home see **section 4, ‘Online and digital activities’** and **booklet 1506, Keeping active and involved.**



Set up simple and impromptu activities

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Put a chair near a window so the person can look outside. Ask them about what they can see.



Place on a side table items that will interest them or stimulate their senses, such as magazines, wool and knitting needles, fresh flowers, or objects related to things they enjoy.



Hang pictures for the person to look at. Choose images they can relate to, such as local places, animals or their friends and family.

Crafts and creative arts

People with dementia can enjoy a wide range of arts and crafts, whether for themselves or as gifts for friends or family members. Suggest that the person you're caring for starts by doing creative hobbies that they've enjoyed in the past. This can give them a sense of familiarity and a chance to reminisce. They may then enjoy trying new and related activities. There are many resources that may help – such as guides, recipes and colouring picture outlines – available online for free.

Cooking/baking

Help the person choose a simple recipe they can follow one step at a time, such as making shortbread, pancakes, barfi, baklava or simple soup or pasta dishes. Break down tasks and recipes into simple steps. Or suggest ways that the person can help you. They could read out the recipe, stir ingredients, peel vegetables or roll and cut pastry. Or they may enjoy watching and helping you taste the mixture or ingredients. They might also enjoy decorating a cake or biscuits that you have baked.

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Helping someone enjoy creative and artistic activities

If the person is frustrated that they can't do an activity as well as they used to, adapt the activity to match their abilities or break it down into simple steps. Avoid resources that are just for children. Look for things that are aimed at an older audience, such as 'mindful' colouring books for adults.

Making a collage

Suggest that the person uses materials such as paper, ribbon and pieces of fabric to create a collage. You could also cut out paper shapes or pictures for them to use. They may enjoy arranging shapes onto a pre-drawn image, such as putting petals onto a flower or clothes onto a person. Non-toxic glue sticks are handy to use for this.

Drawing

If the person enjoys drawing, suggest they draw something that is important to them. They may enjoy drawing around an outline. Or if they enjoy colouring within an outline, suggest they use an adult colouring book. Try to find one with a theme they are interested in, such as 'animals'. For related creative activities such as online colouring see **section 4, 'Online and digital activities'**.

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'Our granddaughter is at the colouring stage. We have family colouring sessions, which mum loves to join in with. To be honest, we all enjoy our mammoth colouring sessions, it's strangely calming and therapeutic!'

Carer for a person with dementia

Painting

If the person doesn't want to paint from scratch, you could draw an outline for them to paint within. Or suggest they try aqua paint. This is a black outline on a white background that changes to technicolour when it's brushed with water. You can buy many aqua paint sets online.

Woodwork

If the person enjoys woodwork, they could make a window box for plants, a bird box or other small items. Or they may enjoy lighter tasks like polishing, varnishing or sanding. Help them plan what to make and how. Make sure they are supported if necessary when using any sharp or heavy tools. They might also like to assemble pre-cut wooden kits.

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Craft supplies

Make up a box of craft supplies so the person can enjoy creative activities that involve less planning.

Writing

If the person enjoys writing, suggest that they write short fiction, or stories about their past. Their younger family members including children and grandchildren may enjoy hearing and reading their stories. Or suggest they do shorter writing activities. They could write down the items you need for a shopping list, or write a letter or greetings card. Many people also enjoy writing poems. Poetry and other creative writing can provide a powerful insight into a person's emotions and help them to express themselves. For related activities see **'Book clubs' on page 12** and **'Reading' on page 30**.

More creative activities

- origami
- beadwork
- shaping modelling clay
- making a birthday or greetings card
- flower arranging and pressing
- sorting coins or hardware like nuts and bolts
- weaving or braiding
- sewing buttons or seams
- stacking or sorting coloured plastic cups
- knitting a scarf, socks or knitted squares
- making decorations, such as stars, paper chains or bunting.

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Find advice and information online



Look on the internet for more ideas. You'll find lots of resources and 'how to' video tutorials.

Music and singing

Musical activities can trigger powerful memories and emotions. They can also help people connect with others. Singing or playing music can make people feel relaxed and uplifted. It can also help people calm down if they feel upset or frustrated. Many people with dementia who have memory problems continue to remember tunes and lyrics as their condition progresses.

Sing-along

Buy a song book so the person you're caring for can sing along to the tunes. Try to find a book that includes their favourite songs – see **'Making a playlist of favourite songs'** on page 60. Singing can help a person slow and control their breathing, which can help them relax. For related activities see **'Singing groups'** on page 14.

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Playing an instrument

People with dementia who previously learnt to play a musical instrument often find they can still play as their condition progresses. If the person you are caring for plays an instrument, encourage them to keep playing it. Suggest that they play music that's very familiar to them. If they can't already play an instrument, suggest that they start out with an instrument like a drum or castanets.



Find music online



For ideas about related activities see **'Listening to music online'** on page 60.



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Helping someone enjoy a musical activity

If the person can't sing or play an instrument, they may enjoy humming, whistling, clapping or tapping their feet to familiar songs.

Playing games

Games can give people a chance to have fun and enjoy themselves in the moment. They can also give families a chance to enjoy spending time together. Children may enjoy playing games with their parents and grandparents. You can buy many games from the Alzheimer's Society online shop – shop.alzheimers.org.uk

Jigsaw puzzles

Doing a puzzle can be absorbing and satisfying. Choose a jigsaw that is suitable for the person's abilities. To help the person find relevant pieces you could sort them into piles with similar colours. Or use magnetic pieces or puzzles that can be placed onto a sheet with a picture of the final image. Some puzzles are specifically designed for people who have dementia. You can also order personalised jigsaws from shops or online that use your own picture or photograph.

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‘My other half has four dementia jigsaws which have been the best value of anything I have bought.’

Carer for a person with dementia

Creative Scenes™

These sets have magnetic pieces that people can arrange to create a 'scene'. Each set has a specific scene as a background, including 'The Tool Shed', 'The Allotment' and 'The Sewing Box'. They are available at shop.alzheimers.org.uk

Activity books

You can buy a wide variety of activity books, including books with crosswords, word searches or Sudoku. Some books are more challenging than others. Choose one that matches the person's ability.



Make sure the person enjoys games

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Some people don't enjoy playing games because they worry about losing and feeling embarrassed. Therefore make sure the person enjoys playing games and that they don't feel like they're being tested. Aim to get the person talking, laughing and feeling part of something. Avoid games with too many rules – or play for fun, not focusing on how things 'should' be done.

Suggest games the person has enjoyed playing in the past, to avoid them having to learn new rules. If they find it difficult to follow rules and sequences of actions, try to adjust or simplify the game. Or suggest they play as part of a team.

Electronic games

You can play many games on consoles such as Nintendo Wii and Sony PlayStation. Choose games that reflect the person's interests, such as sports they used to enjoy playing or watching. The person can also play electronic games on a tablet or smart phone.

There are also many digital games you can play on a computer, smart phone or tablet. For ideas see [‘Using apps’ on page 63](#) and [‘Digital games’ on page 59](#).

Quizzes

If the person you are caring for enjoys quizzes, you will find lots on the internet on a range of topics. There are also lots of quiz programmes on the radio, television or DVD boxsets.

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‘If the rules of a game seem too complicated, make some new, simpler ones.’

Carer for a person with dementia



General games

- card games such as snap (or make up your own)
- dominoes
- feely box – the person can put in their hands and guess what's inside (such as soap, socks or a pine cone)
- Jenga®
- build a matchstick tower
- Connect 4® (including the giant version)
- Meccano®
- darts (including magnetic or velcro darts)
- wooden maze games
- 5asideCHESS – a short and easy-to-learn variation of chess. See 'Other useful organisations' on page 64 for more information.

Board games

- bingo (including audio or picture bingo)
- Ludo
- Scrabble® (you could use a random selection of Scrabble tiles to make as many words as possible)
- draughts
- snakes and ladders
- tiddlywinks.

Sensory activities

Sensory activities can be relaxing and enjoyable. As the person's condition progresses, they may find it more difficult to process information or communicate verbally. They may enjoy sensory activities that support and encourage them to engage with the world through sight, touch, smell, hearing or taste.

Using sight

- Show the person photos, images or videos of events, people or places from their past. You can use websites like YouTube and apps to find images. For suggestions see '**Reminiscing**' on page 50.
- If the person enjoys watching television, they may like to watch nature and historical programmes with stimulating and interesting images. If the person spends a lot of time in bed, try to make their field of vision interesting. Perhaps position them so they can see a view out of a window or so they can see brightly coloured objects or flowers.
- Many people find it relaxing to watch fish in a tank. You could get a selection of different sized and coloured fish, or download a fish tank display app – see '**Using apps**' on page 63.
- If the person enjoys watching bubbles, you could get a bubble kit and blow different sized bubbles.

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Using smell

- Many people enjoy the smell of fresh air and the outdoor environment, such as cut grass or wood smoke. Support the person you're caring for to spend time in a garden or a park. Ask whether the smells remind them of anything.
- Cooking smells can be calming, especially if they are associated with happy memories from childhood.
- You can buy scented aromatherapy oils, including lavender and lemon balm. Fill small containers with different herbs or toiletries so the person can close their eyes and guess the smell. Or you can buy a 'Scentscape' set from our online shop – shop.alzheimers.org.uk

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Helping someone enjoy sensory activities

The person may use facial expressions, sounds or body language to communicate whether they are enjoying an activity. Always give the person your full attention while you are doing an activity with them.

Using taste

- Encourage and support the person to eat food with a variety of tastes and textures, such as flavoured ice lollies, different types and thicknesses of soup, or treats from their childhood.
- Think of food that will make them think about the past or remind them of a particular festival or season.
- Always make sure that any food you suggest is suitable for the person to prevent problems such as choking.

Using hearing

- The person you are caring for may enjoy listening to the radio, a CD or a playlist. Help them find songs they've enjoyed listening to in the past.
- Background sounds like birdsong, waves crashing or fire crackling can be calming to listen to. You can find many of these sounds online, and on phone and tablet apps.
- The person may enjoy listening to audiobooks, or to you talking. You could read to them or recite poetry.

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‘Poetry is often good as it is short and doesn’t need much concentration.’

Carer for a person with dementia

Using touch

- Compile a 'rummage box' that contains different objects, such as badges, cards, coins and shells. Some of these could have particular meaning to the person, such as objects related to old hobbies or jobs.
- If the person you're caring for enjoys feeling different textures or fabrics, suggest that they hold a fidget muff or a sensory blanket. These have buttons, beads and fabrics that they can touch and stroke. They may also enjoy stroking a doll or a soft toy. You could create a 'fiddle box' that contains fabrics, paper and cords with different textures that you know they like.
- Offer to give the person a massage by rubbing cream into their hands.
- Give the person a manicure, including filing and painting their nails.
- Help the person brush or style their hair.
- If they are happy for you to, help the person trim their beard, or shave.
- Remember that the person may have sensitive skin, so always use a light and gentle touch.

3



Life story activities

Life story activities involve using items like photographs or objects to create a book, film, photo album or memory box that tells a person's life history. This can help a person with dementia reflect on their life, including their family, job, achievements, hobbies, holidays or other interests. Life story work done with older grandchildren can be a great way to bring the generations together. Doing life story activities that record a person's life and favourite memories can help them communicate, express themselves and raise their self-esteem. If they are concerned about photographs getting damaged, use copies instead.

3

Bear in mind that some people may have painful memories or have lived through difficult events, so they may not want to talk about certain things. If the person becomes upset, allow them to express their feelings, and check whether they would like to continue the activity or would rather do something else.

Making a memory box

Help the person create a 'memory box' that contains objects from their past. Gather keepsakes and treasured objects such as photographs, letters and other items. Encourage them to talk about why the items are important to them. Encourage them to handle, smell or look at the objects in the box and to discuss the memories they evoke.



Making a life story book

Use photographs, postcards or mementoes to compile a scrapbook about the person's life. Include events, relationships and activities they have enjoyed. Help them write notes about their memories alongside photographs and pictures. They could split the scrapbook by theme, such as important people and memorable events. If the person enjoys doing digital activities they can create a digital life story book using video clips, photos and text. They could also use a digital or talking photo album to display their favourite photographs. For online life story activities see '[Reminiscing online](#)' on page 61.

More life story activities

- watch family videos
- look at photos of family, holidays and pets
- record the person talking about their life history – see '[Digital life history](#)' on page 61.

3



Helping someone enjoy a life story activity

Label photographs and images so that you can gently help the person identify a person or place from their past. This will help them to avoid feeling anxious or embarrassed if they don't remember something. Use the person's senses to spark their memory – the smell of a particular food, drink or flower may remind them of past holidays or special occasions. You could play music they have enjoyed or associate with particular events. For more activities that use smell and other senses see '[Sensory activities](#)' on page 44.

Reminiscing

Reminiscing can be very enjoyable. Reminiscence activities can also help people communicate and lift their mood. The person you are caring for may enjoy talking or hearing about events or people from the past. Many people with dementia can continue to access their long-term memories for a long time after they are diagnosed.

As with life story activities, it's important to bear in mind that some people may not want to revisit upsetting or difficult memories from their past. Also, with shared memories, the person may remember things differently to how you remember them. Keep in mind that the accuracy of the story is usually less important than the enjoyment the person will get from telling it.

3

Using books

Find books about the area where the person grew up or a place that is special to them. Or look for 'coffee table' books about a time or theme from the past that the person is interested in. These books are designed to have large pages and lots of photos.

Using music

Music can evoke strong memories. Encourage the person to listen to songs or music from the past. Ask about their favourite songs and what they remind them of. For more ideas see '[Making a playlist of favourite songs](#)' on page 60.



Using a museum box

Some museums loan out 'memory boxes' that contain objects from their collections that can trigger people's memories of the past. Contact your local museum to see whether they offer this service.

Using pictures

Compile pictures of past events that the person watched or took part in, such as historic or sporting events. You could collate old newspapers or postcards, or look online for photos from news stories in the past. Help the person make a scrapbook or pinboard with pictures they enjoy looking at. Ask about their memories of the event or place in the pictures.



Helping someone enjoy reminiscence activities

Don't ask the person whether they remember specific things. If they don't remember, this could be distressing. Instead ask open questions like 'Can you tell me more about that?' or 'How did that make you feel?'. Always give them your full attention, even if you've heard a story many times before. The memory may be particularly important to them or they may be trying to communicate a strong emotion or something important about their identity.



3

Using plants or flowers

Talk to the person about flowers or plants in their life. They may associate certain plants with certain memories, including strong-scented herbs such as rosemary, mint and sage or scented flowers such as roses, lavender and jasmine.

Using video

The person may enjoy watching old TV series, clips from vintage movies or adverts. You can search YouTube for videos on a particular event or from a particular decade. For related activities and using YouTube see '**Reminiscing online**' on page 61. You could also buy a Memory Bank DVD. Memory Bank is a series of DVDs featuring archive films, with themes such as holidays, working life and sport.

More reminiscence activities

- Watch an old movie – such as a Bollywood saga, musical or silent film.
- Use discussion or fact cards to chat about events from the recent or distant past.
- Use memory cards – such as 'As we were' cards and 'Famous faces' cards.

3







4

Online and digital activities

Doing activities online can help people feel they are keeping up with the world. There is a wide range of opportunities for someone to enjoy things like podcasts, streaming and current affairs websites. Online activities can also give people new ways to stay in touch with others. An increasing number of activities can be done on a computer or other digital device. Advances in touchscreen technology have also made digital devices simpler and easier to use.



For more information on online and digital technology that can help, see factsheet 437, **Using technology to help with everyday life.**

4



Helping someone enjoy digital and online activities

As well as being enjoyable, online activities and technology can help bridge the gap between generations. Children might enjoy showing their grandparents how to use social media, create a playlist or 'paint' on a touchscreen tablet.

Keeping connected online

There are many ways that people can use digital and online technology to stay in touch with friends and family, and with what's happening in the wider world.

Digital photo frame

Help the person collate and upload their favourite photographs to a digital photo frame. For related ideas see [‘Reminiscing online’ on page 61](#).

Video calls

Video calls are a great way to stay in touch with friends and family members. People with dementia can find it enjoyable and helpful to see the person they're talking to on the computer screen rather than just hearing their voice on a telephone call. You could set up a regular Skype video call if the person you are caring for enjoys chatting to someone who lives far away. Other apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp also have a video call function.

4

“

‘I use WhatsApp for both video calls and texting – my 87-year-old partially deaf dad finds the sound quality on his tablet is much better than his telephone.’

Carer for a person with dementia

Social media

The person you're caring for may enjoy using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to look at messages and photographs that their friends and family have posted. They may also enjoy posting their own messages and photos. It's important to stay safe online and ensure that no personal information is given to strangers.

Talking Point

Talking Point is Alzheimer's Society's online community – alheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint. It is a great way to connect and communicate with other people who are affected by dementia. You can connect and share your experiences and receive support. As well as discussions for carers, there are discussions for people with dementia. You can use Talking Point on a computer, smart phone or tablet. It is free and available 24 hours a day, every day.

Dementia Diaries

The Dementia Diaries website collates and shares audio diaries that have been recorded by people living with dementia. You can listen to people's diary entries online. People who have dementia are also encouraged to sign up to create their own diary entries.

4



Using accessible resources

Audio transcription and speech recognition software are available for people with accessibility needs. Virtual assistants such as Alexa, Siri and Google Assistant can help people manage basic activities such as listening to music. They may make it easier for the person to do things online.

Digital games

People can play lots of games on a computer, tablet or smart phone. You will also find lots of games online, including puzzle games and card games, such as Solitaire.

For related activities see **'Electronic games'** on page 42 and **'Using apps'** on page 63.



Listening to music online

There are many websites and apps that people can use to listen to music on their computer, mobile phone or tablet. Spotify is one example.

Making a playlist of favourite songs

Encourage the person to make a playlist of their favourite songs and music. This is something children and younger family members may also enjoy helping with. The website Playlist for Life has information about music and dementia, and advice about how and when to listen to music.

You could use the person's playlist to play 'name that tune'. Play the first line of a song and see whether they can name it. You could also put a CD player and a selection of CDs close to where the person likes to sit.

4



Related musical activities

For related musical activities that people can do at home see '**Music and singing**' on page 38. For information about using YouTube to find videos and performances, including musicals, see '**Watching videos**' on page 62. YouTube also has a karaoke feature which the person may enjoy.

Reminiscing online

Compiling a family tree

You will find lots of information online about researching a family tree. Compiling a family tree can be a good opportunity for the person with dementia to do an activity with younger members of their family. You could use photographs to encourage the person to chat about their relations and make a pictorial family tree on a large piece of paper that the person can enjoy looking at.

Digital life history

You can use technology to record the person talking about their life history. This could be an audio or video recording. You could use a microphone, digital video camera or webcam. Many computers, tablets and smart phones come with recording software installed. There are also recording apps that you can download. This is another activity that younger members of the family might enjoy helping with.

Try recording in short sessions so it doesn't become overwhelming – you could focus on one topic at a time. Prepare prompts such as questions or photographs, but you don't have to stick to them. Encourage the person to talk about things that interest them.

As with all reminiscence activities, be mindful of sad or painful memories that the person may not want to discuss or relive.

For related activities see **'Life story activities'** on page 48.

4



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Reminiscence apps

There are various apps to help people reminisce, including:

- **My House of Memories** – create a ‘memory tree’ with objects, photos and videos
- **GreyMatters** – upload photos, text, films and music to create an online life story book.

For more suggestions about using apps to enjoy games and music see **‘Using apps’ on page 63**. For more ideas about reminiscence activities people can do at home see **‘Reminiscing’ on page 50**.

Watching videos

The person you are caring for may enjoy watching video clips from specific decades on YouTube or on the BBC reminiscence archive. Ask about their favourite movie or music stars, films, comedies and sports. Watch related clips, such as history films, songs, or clips from TV comedies or drama series. You could also search for videos or clips relating to their working life or family history. Ask them what they enjoy about the clips and what memories they spark.



Shopping online

Instead of visiting and browsing the shops, a person with dementia may enjoy shopping online. They could compile an online food shop or browse for clothes. This is also an activity that younger family members might enjoy doing with them. As the person's dementia progresses, it is important to make sure they have the 'mental capacity' to continue making purchases and to protect them at online retailers. For more information see **factsheet 460, Mental Capacity Act 2005**.

Using apps

Lots of apps are designed specifically for people with dementia. People can use them online or download them to use on a tablet, smart phone or mobile device. For apps that have life story and reminiscing activities see '**Reminiscing online**' on page 61.

There are also lots of creative and activity apps including:

- **clevermind** – has speech recognition, large buttons and fonts, games and quizzes
- **Lumosity** – has activities and games
- **MindMate** – has a TV and music section, games and a life story section
- **TheColor** – do colouring online and save, print or email it to friends and family
- **Pocket Pond** – feed and catch fish, and customise nature effects.

4



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Other useful organisations

5asideCHESS

www.5asidechess.com

5asideCHESS is a social enterprise that aims to reduce loneliness and social isolation. They produce a shorter and easy-to-learn version of chess, available to purchase from their website.

AcTo Dementia

www.actodementia.com

AcTo Dementia is a website with recommendations and guidance about touchscreen apps for people with dementia, including lots of games and activities.

Age Exchange

020 8318 9105

hello@age-exchange.org.uk

www.age-exchange.org.uk

Age Exchange is a reminiscence charity and national centre for reminiscence arts. They can help people put together reminiscence boxes.

Age UK

0800 678 1602 (advice line, 8am–7pm)

www.ageuk.org.uk

5



Wales – Age Cymru

0300 303 44 98 (advice line, 9am–4pm Monday–Friday)
advice@agecymru.org.uk
www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru

Northern Ireland – Age NI

0808 808 7575 (advice line, 9am–5pm Monday–Friday)
advice@ageni.org
www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland

Age UK, Age Cymru and Age NI provide a range of different services including general information on aspects of living well with dementia. They may also run events or activities in your local area. Age UK also produce LifeBook, a free booklet in which you can write important and useful information about a person's life.

AlzProducts

024 7642 2224
www.alzproducts.co.uk

AlzProducts has an online shop with lots of dementia activities, including sensory activities.

Arts 4 Dementia

020 3633 9954
info@arts4dementia.org.uk
www.arts4dementia.org.uk

Arts 4 Dementia is a charity that facilitates and signposts creative projects and visits to arts venues for people with dementia and carers.



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

BBC Reminiscence Archive

www.bbcrewind.co.uk

BBC Reminiscence Archive is a website of archive material, designed to help prompt memories for people with dementia.

Bounce Alzheimer's Therapy (BAT) Foundation

07982 813106

ian@batfoundation.com

www.batfoundation.com

The BAT Foundation delivers a national table tennis Alzheimer's Therapy Programme and produces resources on table tennis for people with dementia.

British Gymnastics – Love to Move programme

www.britishgymnasticsfoundation.org/lovetomove

British Gymnastics' Love to Move programme provides a downloadable guide to dementia-friendly seated gymnastics that can be done at home.

5

Dementia Adventure

01245 237548 (9am–5.00pm Monday–Friday)

info@dementiaadventure.co.uk

www.dementiaadventure.co.uk

Dementia Adventure arranges small group short breaks and holidays for people with dementia and carers.



Dementia Diaries

www.dementiadiaries.org

Dementia Diaries is a website that collates and shares audio diaries that have been recorded by people living with dementia.

House of Memories

learning@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories

House of Memories is a museum-led dementia awareness programme offering training, resources and activities to help carers support people living with dementia.

Independent Age

0800 319 6789 (8.30am–5.30pm Monday–Friday)

advice@independentage.org

www.independentage.org

Independent Age provides free advice for older people and their families about care and support, and health and mobility. It also provides friendship services and advice about getting out and about.

Living made easy

0300 999 0004 (helpline, 10am–4pm Monday–Friday)

info@dlf.org.uk

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Living made easy provides advice and information on assistive technology that can help people with dementia live more independently, including doing leisure activities.



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Memory Bank DVDs

01904 876550

info@yfanefa.com

www.yfanefa.com/memory_bank

Memory Bank DVDs are a series of six themed reminiscence DVDs featuring archive films.

National Trust

0344 800 1895 (support line, 9am–5.30pm Monday–Friday,
9am–4pm weekends and bank holidays)

enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

The National Trust is a conservation charity with many historic and countryside sites available to visit. It's committed to making its sites accessible for people with dementia.

NHS

www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/activities

The NHS website offers ideas and suggestions about activities for people with dementia, including people in the later stages of dementia.

parkrun

www.parkrun.org.uk

parkrun organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs. They are open to everyone, free, and are safe and easy to take part in.



Pictures to Share

michelle@picturestoshare.co.uk

www.picturestoshare.co.uk

Pictures to Share produces picture books for people with dementia.

Playlist for Life

0141 404 0683

info@playlistforlife.org.uk

www.playlistforlife.org.uk

Playlist for Life is a charity that helps people with dementia create a unique and personal music playlist.

Ramblers

www.ramblers.org.uk

Ramblers is England's largest network of health walks, helping people to lead a more active lifestyle.

Reading Well Books on Prescription

www.reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/dementia

Reading Well Books on Prescription has a reading list of books for people with dementia that are available for free through public libraries.



Relish

0203 448 2001 (8.30am–5.30pm Monday–Friday)

info@relish-life.com

www.relish-life.com

Relish offers activity products that have been specifically developed for people living with dementia.

Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)

www.rhs.org.uk/advice

The RHS has lots of advice and tips about gardening, including beginners' guides.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

www.scie.org.uk/dementia

SCIE provides online information resources on all aspects of dementia and dementia care including practical tips and ideas for a variety of activities.

The Sporting Memories Foundation

www.sportingmemoriesnetwork.com

The Sporting Memories Foundation is a charity dedicated to sports reminiscence and physical activities.

5



tide (together in dementia everyday)

0151 237 2669

carers@tide.uk.net

www.tide.uk.net

tide is a UK network of carers, former carers and health and care professionals. It campaigns to improve the lives of carers and those they care for across the UK. They have a free guide on life story work that can be downloaded from their website.

Wildlife Trusts

01636 677711 (9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

www.wildlifetrusts.org

Wildlife Trusts is a charity helping people to connect with the natural world, offering access to nature reserves, activities, events and volunteering opportunities.



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Our information is based on evidence and need, and is regularly updated using quality-controlled processes. It is reviewed by experts in health and social care and people affected by dementia.

Reviewed by: Professor Monica Busse-Morris, Director for Mind, Brain, Neuroscience Trials in the Centre for Trials Research (CTR) at Cardiff University and Professor Claire Surr, Professor of Dementia Studies, Leeds Beckett University

It has also been reviewed by people affected by dementia.

To give feedback on this booklet, or for a list of sources, please email publications@alzheimers.org.uk

This booklet can be downloaded from our website at alzheimers.org.uk/activitieshandbook

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We are Alzheimer's Society. We are a vital source of support and a powerful force for change for everyone affected by dementia. We provide help and hope.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit [alzheimers.org.uk](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk) or call our **Dementia Connect support line** on **0333 150 3456**. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)



People affected by dementia need our support more than ever. With your help we can continue to provide the vital services, information and advice they need. To make a single or monthly donation, please call us on **0330 333 0804** or go to [alzheimers.org.uk/donate](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/donate)



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