



## MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

Our activities in life, what we do, define who we are, how we see ourselves, and the quality of our lives. When an individual has Alzheimer's disease, their abilities are affected by the changes in their brain. In turn, it can become challenging for the individual to participate in activities that they enjoyed in the past. Caregivers, whether they are professionals, families, or friends can adapt activities so that the person(s) they are caring for can continue to do things that will give their life meaning.

There are always areas of strength that remain for people with dementia regardless of how far the disease has progressed. These include things like long term memory, a sense of humour, use of the senses, music appreciation, social skills, and emotional awareness and memory. Meaningful activities should be planned with these strengths in mind.

It is important to remember that the mundane things we do in life, the activities of daily living, also define who we are. These are the things that we all have to do like bathing, making meals, taking out the garbage, and going to work. These activities also become more difficult as the disease progresses, but they are important because these are the activities that determine independence.

There are certain features which are common to all successful activities for persons with Alzheimer's:


- An activity must be appropriate to an individual's level of retained ability
- It should be challenging but not frustrating
- Activities should be simple and purposeful but not childlike
- They should be "no fail" activities and most importantly the person with Alzheimer's should enjoy the activity
- Activities do not have to be elaborate. A walk in the park, watching an old movie, washing windows or sorting laundry are all pursuits that can be enjoyed
- Activities that are truly fulfilling are those where the individual is invited into the process, where the "getting there" is more important than the end product. In other words, the fun and engagement in making the cake or raking the yard is more important than how the cake tastes or whether every leaf is captured

---

## 101 Meaningful Activities

This is a sample list of activities that can work:

1. Listen to music
2. Toss a ball
3. Colour pictures
4. Make homemade lemonade
5. Count trading cards
6. Clip coupons
7. Sort poker chips
8. Read chapters out loud from favourite stories
9. Rake leaves
10. String beads
11. Bake cookies
12. Take photos of the person and you and create a collage
13. Brush or comb one another's hair
14. Participate in the Walk for Memories
15. Plant seeds indoors and outdoors
16. Look at family photographs
17. Wipe off the kitchen table
18. Weed the flowerbed or tend to the garden
19. Fold laundry
20. Have a friend visit with a pet
21. Cut pictures out of greeting cards or magazines
22. Play dominoes
23. Ask the person about his or her favourite childhood books or cartoon characters (you can share yours too)
24. Bake homemade bread
25. Sort objects by shape or colour
26. Sing old songs
27. Invite the person to tell you more when he or she talks about a memory
28. Polish shoes
29. Make a Valentine card
30. Play favourite songs and sing
31. Ask the person about his or her brothers or sisters
32. Make a cherry pie
33. Play with tops or yoyos
34. Make a scrapbook
35. Take a walk around the yard
36. Write a poem together
37. Reminisce about the first day of school
38. String Cheerios to hang outside for birds
39. Make a fresh fruit salad
40. Sweep the patio
41. Tell jokes
42. Fly a kite
43. Have an afternoon tea party
44. Talk about great inventions
45. Look through the pages of a catalogue
46. Look at a map of Canada or other countries and identify provinces, states, and capitals
47. Make a family tree poster
48. Paint a picture
49. Eat a picnic lunch outside
50. Water house plants
51. Play horseshoes
52. Dance
53. Watch a favourite movie together
54. Make homemade ice cream
55. Make holiday cards
56. Reminisce about favourite sports activities the person enjoyed while growing up
57. Write a letter to a friend or family member
58. Dress in your favourite football or soccer team's colour
59. Pop popcorn
60. Name prime ministers and presidents
61. Give a manicure
62. Make paper butterflies
63. Plant a tree
64. Finish famous sayings
65. Feed the squirrels
66. Model with play dough
67. Look at pictures in a comic book
68. Put a puzzle together
69. Sand wood
70. Rub in hand lotion
71. Arrange fresh or dried flowers
72. Remember famous people
73. Recite nursery rhymes
74. Make peanut butter sandwiches
75. Cut up used paper for scratch paper
76. Blow bubbles
77. Take care of a fish tank

- 
- 
78. Bake cupcakes and decorate them
  79. Interview the person about his or her life using either a video camera or cassette recorder
  80. Pick dead leaves off a plant
  81. Make holiday decorations
  82. Cut out pictures from magazines
  83. Put coins in a jar
  84. Put bird seed out for the birds
  85. Decorate a pumpkin
  86. Reminisce about a favourite summer
  87. Roll yarn into a ball
  88. Trace and cut out autumn leaves
  89. Cook a favourite family recipe together
  90. Sort through a drawer
  91. Polish silver or brass
92. Ask the person about his or her first car
  93. Ask the person to show you how to knit or sew (or another favourite hobby)
  94. Make a picture frame out of popsicle sticks and glitter
  95. Play a musical instrument
  96. Keep a journal together
  97. Ask the person to talk about his or her favourite sports hero
  98. Sort playing cards
  99. Ask the person about his or her favourite pet
  100. Wash windows together
  101. Give and get hugs

By Mercedes Hughes, Public Education Coordinator, Alzheimer Society of Toronto, 2007.