

SIMPLE ACTIVITIES

Suggestions of Activities for an Older Person with Cognitive Impairment

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TO KEEP IN MIND

1. A person with cognitive impairment may have difficulty performing complex tasks or activities.
2. Older adults may be more successful with activities they have performed **throughout most of their lives**.
3. Activities should be **simple, adult like, normal, and meaningful**.
4. Nearly any activity can be adapted to the level and type of cognitive skills still retained by the person with the cognitive impairment, no matter how impaired the person is.
5. Most of the activities in which a person with dementia can more easily engage will likely be those of self care (dressing, grooming, bathing, etc.), household tasks (washing dishes, vacuuming, raking leaves, folding laundry, repairing foot stools, etc.), and recreational activities which she or he has enjoyed throughout most of her/his adult life.
6. These suggestions are for people with **moderate to severe impairment**. They are activities the person might enjoy and feel comfortable doing or at least actively participating in. These are just some of many possible ideas.
7. The activities are listed generally in the order in which they are likely to appeal to the person with dementia, because they are **simpler, more familiar, and more obviously useful**.
8. **The activities most likely to be successful are listed first** and the activities most likely to be dropped are listed at the end.
9. Of course any activity the person enjoys (as long as it is safe) is best.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

DRESSING & GROOMING:

10. Fixing/combing hair or a friend's hair
11. Manicure for self or a friend
12. Massaging cream into skin
13. Trying on hats or new clothes
14. Admiring self in mirror
15. Applying makeup

HOUSEHOLD TASKS:

16. Dusting
17. Dry Mopping
18. Sweeping
19. Vacuuming
20. Polishing silver
21. Cooking & baking
22. Arranging serving trays and hors d'oeuvres
23. Setting the table
24. Serving meals
25. Washing & drying dishes

26. Folding towels, laundry, napkins, etc.
27. Shaking out towels, laundry, table cloths, clean throw rugs, etc.
28. Making beds
29. Watering plants
30. Raking leaves
31. Trimming bushes
32. Digging holes in the garden
33. Gardening
34. Repairing small stools
35. Sanding small stools or other recognizable objects made of wood
36. Sorting hardware (nails, screws, nuts, etc.), buttons, holiday cards, coupons, etc.
37. Cutting coupons
38. Feeding and grooming pets
39. Feeding birds in a bird feeder

RECREATIONAL:

40. Singing
41. Listening to music (perhaps through headphones)
42. Reciting or listening to old poems and familiar stories
43. Fill in blanks of old proverbs or sayings
44. Spelling
45. Dancing
46. Playing simple card games
47. Sorting playing cards
48. Conversing about items: in a "theme basket", in the environment, old items (eg., antique farm implements), personal photographs, clothes which need mending or laundering,
49. Conversing about advice to give younger people
50. Exercise to music individually or in groups
51. Volley ball
52. Large cloth (eg., bed spread, large towel) arm movement/wave making
53. Walking indoors or outdoors
54. Kicking a ball
55. Feeling a variety of textures
56. Looking through magazines, books, newspapers, cards, jewelry, etc.
57. Stuffing and unstuffing envelopes
58. Folding papers
59. Hosting and serving at a tea party or other celebration/gathering

HOBBIES & CRAFTS:

60. Wrapping yarn around cardboard or into a ball
61. Sanding wood (e.g., a disconnected table leg)
62. Arranging flowers

SOURCES:

- Weaverdyck, S. (1991) Intervention to Address Dementia as a Cognitive Disorder. Chapter 13 in D. Coons (Ed.) Specialized Dementia Care Units. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Weaverdyck, S. (1999) Activities: A Key to Pleasure for Clients with Dementia. Home Health Aide Digest, 5(6), 10-12, November-December, 1999.