

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice

ENGAGING ACTIVITIES FOR INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

FACT SHEET FOR INDIVIDUALS LIVING AT HOME OR IN ASSISTED LIVING

Dementia can significantly impact an individual's ability to engage with the world around them. However, activities tailored to the individual's abilities and interests can improve quality of life by providing opportunities for social interaction, physical movement, cognitive stimulation, and emotional expression.

This fact sheet highlights several appropriate and beneficial activities for individuals living with dementia and tips for how to implement them. For additional resources and information, visit our website at <https://nursinghome411.org/dementia-care-in-the-community>.

Music Therapy

What it is: Music therapy uses music as a tool to improve mental, physical, and emotional health. It can take many forms, from singing and listening to live or recorded music, to interactive activities like drumming or using small instruments.

Benefits:

- ⇒ **Emotional Well-being:** Music has the power to evoke memories, reduce anxiety, decrease agitation, and improve mood. It can bring comfort and joy to individuals with dementia, even when verbal communication becomes difficult.
- ⇒ **Cognitive Engagement:** Listening to familiar songs or participating in sing-alongs stimulates memory and cognitive function. Music also helps with attention, focus, and recognition.
- ⇒ **Physical Movement:** Active participation in rhythm-based activities, such as clapping or moving to the beat, can improve coordination and motor skills.
- ⇒ **Social Connection:** Group music activities encourage social interaction, creating a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation.

Tips for Implementation:

- Select music that aligns with participants' personal tastes and backgrounds.
- Avoid sensory overload.
- Create a calm and inviting atmosphere, possibly dimming the lights and ensuring comfort for all participants.
- Consider working with a music therapist for more structured sessions. A list of board-certified music therapists can be found at www.cbmt.org.

Adaptive Dance

What it is: A movement-based activity adapted for individuals with dementia focusing on gentle, rhythmic movement that suits a wide range of mobility and coordination levels.

Benefits:

- ⇒ **Physical Movement:** Enhances flexibility, coordination, and balance.
- ⇒ **Emotional Expression:** Offers a therapeutic outlet to reduce frustration or agitation.
- ⇒ **Cognitive Stimulation:** Encourages mental engagement by following patterns and responding to music.
- ⇒ **Social Interaction:** Fosters community and reduces isolation through group participation.

Remember: The goal of these activities is not perfection—but **connection, joy, and purpose**. Small, thoughtful adaptations can go a long way in helping someone living with dementia feel included and empowered.

Tips for Implementation:

- Ensure a clutter-free, safe space to minimize fall risk.
- Use calming, upbeat music that's familiar but not overwhelming.
- Keep the sessions short (15-30 minutes) to maintain energy and interest.

Art and Creative Expression

What it is: Engaging in art activities such as painting, drawing, or crafting to support self-expression and cognitive engagement.

Benefits:

- ⇒ **Self-Expression:** Helps individuals convey emotions, thoughts, and memories that may be hard to communicate with words.
- ⇒ **Cognitive and Motor Skills:** Stimulates brain activity and helps maintain hand-eye coordination.
- ⇒ **Emotional Release:** Provides comfort, boosts self-esteem, and promotes a sense of accomplishment.
- ⇒ **Social Interaction:** Encourages cooperation and communication in group settings.

Tips for Implementation:

- Use safe, easy-to-handle materials and tools
- Provide large-print instructions and simple designs.
- Encourage freedom of expression without focusing on results.
- Try to avoid projects that may be too childlike; instead, incorporate adult-appropriate themes.
- Display finished works in art shows or community exhibits to celebrate creativity.

Getting Started: 3 Simple Ways to Begin Today

- Play a favorite song during breakfast and clap along together.
- Try a 5-minute seated stretch or gentle dance in the living room.
- Set up a drawing station with large-print designs and washable markers.