

**UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO HOSPITALS  
MEMORY CENTER**

**ACTIVITIES FOR THE MEMORY IMPAIRED**

Activities, which involve repetitive actions using skills developed when the person was younger, are perfect for the memory impaired. The most important part of these activities is that they should give the patient a sense of accomplishment without a sense of frustration. The job need not be done expertly.

The best activities are those that utilize the patient's old skills. If the patient finds the activity to be upsetting, stop it and attempt something else. Try activities when the patient is well rested. Keep the environment as low key as possible and avoid other distractions. Praise the patient for a job well done. The patient may have a shorter attention span and so the length of each activity may need to be shortened.

As the disease progresses activities may have to be modified or made simpler.

**DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES-**Dusting, vacuum cleaning, mopping the floor, making the bed, washing dishes, folding napkins, folding laundry, changing bed linen, sorting socks, setting the table, cleaning the table after a meal, washing fruit, washing salad vegetables, tearing lettuce leaves, whipping cream, beating eggs, raking leaves, sweeping the sidewalk or path, gardening, watering flowers or plants, playing with grandchildren (avoid having the patient baby-sit for children) petting the dog, winding balls of yarn, knitting, crocheting, wood working, sanding wood. Remember not to offer any power tools to accomplish a task.

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES-** Walking, dancing to old music, toss the ball, simple exercises sitting in a chair, bathing, shampooing hair, brushing teeth, shaving with an electric razor, combing or brushing hair, pushing a grocery cart, walking stairs, bat the balloon, catch the bean bag, bowling, shuffleboard, basketball using small ball and wastebasket.

**MENTAL ACTIVITIES-**Ask the patient to give you the opposite words for simple things such as up (down), in (out), high (low), black (white). Ask the patient to name the holidays that occur at certain times of the year-what holiday occurs on January 1st?, what holiday do we celebrate waving the American flag?, what holiday do we carve pumpkins?, what holiday do we eat turkey? Ask the patient to solve some simple math problems (write on a paper simple additions, subtractions). Ask the person to tell you all the words they can think of that begin with the letter "S" or any other letter. Read to the patient-Bible, books they used to enjoy, newspaper, and magazines. Television-insure that the patient does not view programs with violence, fighting, arguing, and hitting. Children's educational programs, animal programs, The Price is Right, Wheel of Fortune, comedies, sports programs tend to

be the most popular. Avoid programs such as soap operas, Jerry Springer where the people are shouting at each other. Sorting objects into different piles-buttons, coins, keys, and shoes. Playing card games-Go fish, Old Maid. Doing simple puzzles-less than 100 pieces. Looking over catalogues of clothing, sporting goods, camping goods, and scenic vacations can also evoke old memories and encourage discussion. Drawing, coloring in coloring books, cutting, pasting and tracing are all good activities.

**Reminiscence**-People with moderate to severe memory loss may still be able to recount events of long ago. This enables the person to communicate but also helps them to validate their life and contributions they have made throughout their life. Additional activities include-going over old photo albums. Viewing old videos or 8mm films of years gone by can also be included in this area.

**MEMORY BOX**-Keeping a shoe box or carton of objects and memorabilia that the person used to use when they were younger. This can be reviewed periodically and it can stimulate discussion of attached memories. The person can also pick things out of the memory box using closed eyes and try to tell you what the object is with his/her eyes closed.

**MUSIC**-Playing old music that was popular when the person was younger. Record stores sell tapes of the music that was made famous in the 30's, 40's and 50's. Encourage the person to sing along if possible. Encourage the person to dance to old music. Playing soft, light music that is soothing may relax the patient.

**GAMES**-All games provide recreation and do not have to be played using the accepted rules of the games. Card games, Bingo, Lotto, simple board games, cutting pictures of objects in half and having the person match the two halves, dominoes,

### **ACTIVITIES FOR THE SEVERELY IMPAIRED PATIENT**

As the disease progresses the patient may no longer be able to participate in any of the above activities. Even the most severely demented patient should have some stimulus-the sound of music, the sound of another person's voice, the feel of somebody gently touching them when washing them, brushing their hair or applying skin cream, holding a cuddly stuffed animal or baby doll, looking at brightly colored mobiles hanging from the ceiling above the bed, sound machines playing soft gentle sounds. All of these activities can help the patient maintain a connection with the world around him.

## SIMPLE THINGS TO DO WITH A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

1. Clip Coupons
2. Sort poker chips
3. Count tickets
4. Rake leaves
5. Use a carpet sweeper
6. Read out loud
7. Bake cookies
8. Look up names in the phone book
9. Read the daily paper
10. Ask someone with a child to visit
11. Listen to music
12. Plant seeds indoors or out
13. Look at family photographs
14. Toss a ball
15. Color pictures
16. Make homemade lemonade
17. Wipe off the table
18. Weed the flower bed
19. Make fudge
20. Have a spelling bee
21. Read from the Reader's Digest
22. Fold clothes, fold them again
23. Have a friend visit with a calm pet
24. Cut pictures out of greeting cards
25. Wash silverware
26. Bake homemade bread
27. Sort objects by shape or color
28. Sing old songs
29. Put silverware away
30. Ask simple trivia questions
31. Play favorite songs and sing
32. Take a ride
33. Make a cherry pie
34. Read aloud from a magazine
35. Fold socks
36. Take a walk
37. Reminisce about the 1<sup>st</sup> school day
38. Sting Cheerios to hang outside for birds
39. Make a fresh fruit salad
40. Sweep the patio
41. Color paper shamrocks green
42. Fold towels
43. Take care of a fish tank
44. Have afternoon tea
45. Remember great inventions
46. Play Pictionary
47. Cut out paper dolls
48. Identify states and capitals
49. Make a family tree poster
50. Color a picture of our flag
51. Cook hotdogs outside
52. Water houseplants
53. Reminisce about the 1<sup>st</sup> kiss
54. Play horseshoes
55. Dance
56. Sing favorite hymns
57. Make homemade ice cream
58. Make a birthday cake
59. Put feed out for the birds
60. Sort playing cards by their color
61. Write a letter to a family member
62. Dress in your favorite team's colors
63. Pop popcorn
64. Name the presidents
65. Give a manicure
66. Make paper butterflies
67. Plant a tree
68. Make a May basket
69. Make homemade applesauce
70. Finish famous sayings
71. Feed the ducks
72. Mold with play dough
73. Look through National Geographic
74. Put a puzzle together
75. Sand wood
76. Rub in hand lotion
77. Decorate paper placemats
78. Arrange fresh flowers
79. Remember famous people
80. Straighten out the underwear drawer
81. Finish nursery rhymes
82. Make peanut butter sandwiches
83. Wipe off patio furniture
84. Roll yarn into a ball
85. "Tell me more" when they talk about a memory