



If you are caring for someone living with dementia, you might have noticed a change in their willingness to do certain activities. They may increasingly avoid social situations, stay indoors, or neglect personal hygiene. You might wonder why this happened or how you can help:

Why did the person stop engaging in activities?

Dementia changes a person's brain. These changes can make activities more challenging and daunting. People might withdraw from activities due to:

- Memory loss
- Difficulty planning
- Language impairment
- Changes in balance, hearing, or vision

A person's mood might make them less likely to start or stay engaged in an activity. Mood changes that are common with dementia are:

- Decreased motivation or interest (apathy)
- Sadness or Depression
- Anxiety or irritability

Remember that the person may not have insight into their challenges and symptoms. They are not choosing to feel this way and may be unable to communicate what they are feeling.

Why is it important that the person have activities to do?

Participating in meaningful activities can:

- Improve self-esteem and mood
- Provide physical activity to prevent other health problems
- Reduce feelings of loneliness
- Reduce boredom and day-time napping



How do I choose a meaningful activity?

Try to find activities that match the person's abilities and interests. The activity doesn't have to be fun. You can also choose activities that promote:

- **Productivity:** Helping others, doing household chores, or making important decisions, can help the person feel needed.
- **Self-care:** Encourage the person to bathe, eat, exercise, and socialize to increase independence and overall health.
 - **TIP:** Do the activity at the same time. If they need to brush their hair, you do it too. In the later stages, you can gently guide their hand while they hold the hair brush to keep them involved.
- **Restoration:** With dementia, the brain has to work extra hard to do every-day tasks. It is important to recharge after busy days.
 - **TIP:** Not all people recharge the same way. Choose something that aligns with their personality. This might include spiritual activities, fresh air, or music.

I decided on an activity. How do I encourage the person to get started?

1. Set up the activity and start doing it yourself.
2. Invite the person to join in. Have another activity ready in case they say no.
3. Let the person choose which part of the activity they want to do.
4. Sit on their dominant side, not across from them.
5. Demonstrate the activity rather than trying to explain it.
6. Start simple. Break the activity into smaller steps.
7. Do the activity with them, not for them. Give the person time and space to try it themselves.
8. The goal is to connect, not correct. Let the person make mistakes.
9. Watch for frustration and take a break if needed.
10. Success is relative. Remember that the goal is to have fun, not complete the activity "successfully."

A note about self-care:

Make sure to focus on your health and energy levels too. Your needs are equally important. Caring for yourself will also help you provide better care to others. To learn strategies, click here: <https://www.caregiver.org/pilotIntegration/indexPersistent.html?uri=%2Ftaking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>

Resources:

- Meaningful Activities Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EkO4qjT-xQ>
- Webinar on Meaningful Activities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HujCUc7AOxk&list=PLqiA3A3X-xLlqa8QwqUFCxgLTlR1hLG53&index=4&t=os>
- List of Activities to do at home: https://mkodsorcwebsiteunago.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/Meaningful_Activities_and_Programs.pdf
- Activity Packages: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5KCDs5stIOYagyzSNxmnxIDzIlbX6-fkNU1CNKuMEopogPQ/viewform>

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