

Dear Caregiver,

There are often challenging behaviors that come with various types of dementia including Alzheimer's disease. Your family member can become increasingly forgetful, confused, anxious, and even afraid. Providing a calm environment and providing appropriate activities may bring comfort to your family member.

We are providing resources for the bedside caregiver in sharing meaningful activities with family members that have dementia. Below is a list of items to create a dementia tool kit and recommended activities. You may have many of the items in your home and if not, they are relatively inexpensive. It may be helpful to keep the items in a bin, so they are easily accessible. Keep in mind that not all activities will work for all. Also, what worked in the morning may not work in the afternoon or evening. Consider trying something new and be creative.

Caregivers that need additional assistance can call and speak with an expert at the Alzheimer's Association 24 hours a day. The Alzheimer's hotline number is 1-800-272-3900.

Dementia Tool Kit Items:

- 6 cup muffin pan
- Machine screws
- Large assorted buttons
- Color pencils or crayons
- Large print coloring books
- Large print playing cards
- Large print word search puzzle book
- Towels or washcloths
- Stress ball

Recommended Activities:

- Use the muffin pan and ask family member to sort nuts and bolts by type, length, size, or have the patient match nuts to bolts and screw together. Give them a sense of purpose: “Can you help me sort all these nuts and bolts?”
- Use the muffin tin and ask patients to sort buttons by size, color, shape. Give them a sense of purpose: “Can you help me sort all these buttons?”
- Use colored pencils/crayons to color, this can provide a calm way to pass time.
- Play cards with your family member. If unable to play games, they may enjoy sorting by numbers, colors, or suits.
- If able, some find enjoyment finding words in large print word search puzzles.
- Have them fold towels/washcloths. Give them a sense of purpose: “Can you help me fold these towels?”
- Those with dementia concentrate on what they are holding. The stress ball gives them something to hold and concentrate on (instead of pulling on other items such as sheets, tablecloth etc.)

Other Activities to Consider:

- Walking or other physical activity (if safe). Use chair activities as a substitute.
- Put on relaxing music/relaxation channel. Try to play music from your family member’s era/genre. This may trigger memories. Keep in mind this may be the place in their timeline that they think they are in.
- Keep the surrounding familiar with family pictures and personal items.
- If agitated, reduce stressors/overstimulation, such as loud noise or bright lights.
- Don’t disagree with the family member regarding facts, instead meet them where they are in their mind.
- Use warm blankets, food, or a back rub or foot rub with lotion to provide comfort.
- Provide gentle touch.
- If restless or agitated, look at them and breathe with them. They will often model your controlled breathing, decreasing their agitation.
- Address their needs (toileting, hunger, thirst, pain, hot/cold). Look for non-verbal signs such as restlessness, calling out, increased attempts to get out of bed, etc.

References:

1. Alzheimer’s Association of SE Wisconsin - 2017
2. IATB Dementia Care, LLC. Int J Older People Nurs. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2013 Jun 1. Published in final edited form as Int J Older People Nurs. 2012 Jun; 7(2): 152–162. Published online 2012 Apr 18. Doi: [10.1111/j.1748-3743.2012.00324.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-3743.2012.00324.x)