

A Caregiver's Guide to Dementia: Using Activities and Other Strategies to Prevent, Reduce and Manage Behavioral Symptoms

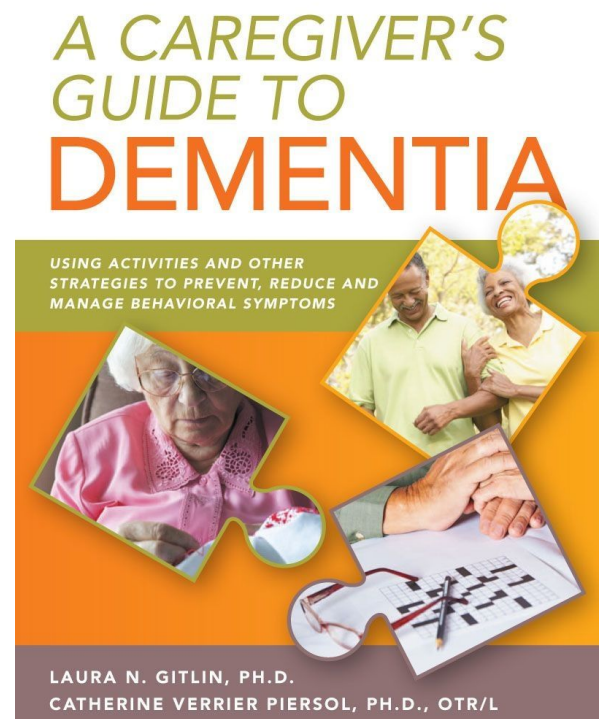
Written by: Laura N. Gitlin, Ph.D and Catherine Verrier Piersol, Ph.D

Why Are Activities Important?

A person with dementia experiences many losses as the disease progresses including difficulties engaging in everyday activities such as work, driving, socializing, previous hobbies, or self-care in the same way as they did previously. As the disease progresses, it may

become increasingly challenging for the person with dementia to think of an activity to participate in, know how to initiate the activity, problem-solve as to how to organize and set up the activity, follow a sequence of actions needed to engage in the activity, recognize errors and self-correct in carrying out the activity, or simply understand what to do. It is not uncommon for a person with dementia to experience boredom, frustration, agitation or depression as he/she loses cognitive abilities and as previously valued everyday activities become more difficult to engage in successfully.

Nevertheless, a person with dementia continues to need to be engaged and participate in daily life in meaningful ways throughout the course of the disease. Being involved in common activities can reinforce a person's sense of self-identity and provide meaning and purpose regardless of the stage of the disease. Helping a person with dementia maintain a sense of purpose and involvement in meaningful activities is an enduring need throughout the course of the disease.



It is important to identify ways of enabling a person with dementia to participate in activities that have meaning and interest to them. Helping a person with dementia to engage in an activity is a critical part of maintaining and/or enhancing their quality of life and should be part of a daily care approach. Activities may include everyday tasks such as dressing, bathing, preparing meals; or hobbies such as gardening, taking a walk, looking at meaningful photographs, exercising, sorting beads or coins, or other special interests such as listening to soothing music or watching a musical or other video of meaning.

Almost any activity can be set up in such a way as to enable a person with dementia at almost any level of cognitive functioning to effectively and meaningfully participate in it. Introducing activities that match to or fit with the person's interests and abilities can benefit both the person with dementia and their family caregiver.