

At Home Activities

**A selection of meaningful activities for people
with dementia, families and carers**



Memory Technology
Resource Room



dementia

under stand together

Staying Engaged in Activities

As dementia progresses it can become challenging to continue activities that were once enjoyed, and the person may become more dependent on in-home activities. It is important to remain independent, active and engaged in meaningful activity to prevent boredom, promote stimulation, provide opportunity for achievement and promote self-esteem. This information booklet to support people with dementia, families and carers was compiled by Emma O'Brien, Occupational Therapist at the Memory Technology Resource Room.



Memory Technology Resource Rooms (MTRRs) showcase a wide range of assistive technologies (AT) and supports for people with memory problems, with the aim of helping people to maintain their independence and improve their quality of life. There are currently 27 MTRRs around the country managed by a healthcare professional, most commonly an Occupational Therapist.

The MTRRs provide a service to people with dementia and other memory problems, their families and carers, and are a resource for healthcare personnel and voluntary agencies. To find out more about a Memory Technology Resource Room in your area please visit <https://www.understandtogether.ie/training-resources/helpful-resources/memory-assistive-technologies/>

This booklet has ideas for activities you can do together.

When selecting an activity with your loved one ensure it is based on previously enjoyed roles and engagement.

Choosing meaningful activities will enhance well-being and improve quality of life. Remember each person is different and may require an activity being adapted. Some consideration should be given to the following:



Adapting

The stage of dementia and the changes a person will experience can impact on their ability to engage in the activity. Choose activities the person enjoys doing, once the activity is meaningful it will promote stimulation, achievement and enjoyment. Activities should be adapted to the level suitable; not too difficult that the person is frustrated and cannot participate, nor too easy that it does not challenge the person to engage. It is important to remember that people with dementia experience engagement differently and some may no longer be able to sequence the steps involved in a task or they may be unable to follow instruction.

Endurance

The person with dementia may be unable to engage in an activity for as long as they once could. This should not mean they can no longer participate. Once the activity is appropriately set up and is meaningful then participation for as little as 10 minutes may be enough to provide feelings of well-being and enjoyment that may last beyond the engagement. Consider short blocks throughout the day.

Safety

Activities may have elements that are unsafe such as chopping vegetables in a cooking activity. A person with dementia may have less safety awareness and therefore it is important that the activity is set up considering this.

Preparing Activities

Consider the following when deciding what activities will be suitable.

Comfort – is the person comfortable, is the person sitting at the right height, can they easily access items.

Environment – is the environment supportive e.g. good lighting, are there distracting sounds, is the temperature right.



Activity Sections

6-10

Household Activities

Baking
Cooking
Laundry
Cleaning
Gardening

19-21

Apps

Brain Training and Games
Relaxation
Reminiscence

12-15

Games and Puzzles

Jigsaws
Board Games
Cards
Word Puzzles

22-23

Sensory Engagement

24-25

Physical Activities

16-17

Art and Crafts

25-26

Useful Websites

17-18

Reminiscence

Life Story Books
Memory Box
Local Publications

Household Activities

Maintaining engagement in roles and responsibilities in the home where possible is important for a person's sense of achievement, identity and self-esteem. Here are some activities that can be enjoyed, but use your judgement and the interest and activity level of the person when choosing activities.

Baking



This can be an enjoyable and reminiscent activity. However it may no longer be completed independently and may need to be adapted.

- Some people will need only some assistance to set up the activity so everything is to hand and they don't forget an important ingredient.
- You may need to prompt the person on each step of the baking process and make sure the oven is on. You can also encourage the person to set a timer once in the oven so that you and they don't forget to turn it off.

For people who need more support in the activity consider the following:

- Involve the person in measuring ingredients.
- Adding, mixing and kneading the ingredients.
- Preparing and icing the cake.

- Encourage conversation about previous times baking; the engagement may promote memory and previous experiences for the person.
- Some people will not be able to do any of the above but being in the room while you are baking, observing the activity and being engaged in conversation about baking experiences, along with the sensory experience of smell and taste may promote fond memories and provide a sense of self and enjoyment.

Cooking



As with baking, you can modify the level of involvement in cooking to suit optimal engagement.

- Choose a meal that is familiar and enjoyed by the person.
- Either prepare the ingredients before you start or involve the person in washing, chopping or adding. This will depend on their safety awareness, ability to sequence, and their understanding of the ingredient and process.
- Some people may enjoy washing vegetables in a basin while sitting at a table.
- For those not able to engage at this level, allow them to observe you doing the activity, encourage conversation about cooking in the past, this along with the sensory experience of smell may promote reminiscence and the recalling of fond memories.
- Setting the table, choosing a table cloth, place mats, add flowers.

Laundry



Not all elements of laundry may be achievable or even enjoyable so consider the elements involved and where some of this can be completed by your loved one:

- **Sorting clothes for washing** – ask the person to separate clothing into colours or fabrics e.g. wool.
- **Hanging out the clothes** – this may not be achievable for everyone or might be observed, however it is an opportunity for fresh air and to promote a sensory experience. Bringing in the clothes might be easier if this is safe.
- **Sorting and Folding** – sitting at the kitchen table together you could sort clothes in colour or fabric or which need to be ironed. Folding and stacking clothes, pillow cases, tea towels, or matching socks and putting these together.
- **Ironing** – where safe to do so provide a small stack of simple items for ironing such as pillow cases.
- **Organising and putting away** – you could involve the person in this activity especially in their own room.

Cleaning



There are many simple cleaning activities the person can be involved in, please remember not all might enjoy this so involve only if appropriate

- **Drying dishes** – if the person cannot stand for too long consider setting up at the table for example, lay out tea towel and place small amount of items for drying maybe just bowls or spoons.
- **Sweeping the floor** – if not completed fully this is okay, the aim is for the person to be involved and to provide them with opportunity for achievement.
- **Tidying up** – the cushions on the couch, or making the beds with you.
- **Organising a space** – For example, a drawer that needs to be sorted, bring laying out items and asking the person to sort it out.
- **Polishing** – if you have old silver from previous generations this might be enjoyable and encourage reminiscence. Polish the wooden surfaces in a room or at the table, lay out photo frames for polishing. This too might encourage conversation and reminiscence about the photo.

Gardening



Some people enjoy gardening and due to the physical demands may no longer engage in it. There are ways to adapt the activity so it can be an enjoyable sensory experience, consider some ideas below:

- Raised flower beds can be helpful and reduce risk of falls.
- Where engagement in the activity needs adapting consider pot planting at the table – lay newspaper down, set up elements required and prompt the person to each step if needed.
- For those where sequencing is challenging have the person observe the activity and encourage them to engage in the tactile experience of the soil. Discuss gardening, past experiences and the seasons.
- **Flower arranging** – flowers from the garden or bought bunch of flowers could be used to arrange for smaller vases.

Stimulating Activity Ideas

Being engaged in daily chores and routines is important; it can support orientation and occupy the person in meaningful activities which enhances quality of life. It is also important to engage in pleasurable activities to stimulate, challenge and enjoy. Participating daily in activities can give routine and structure, and once they are meaningful can improve their quality of life. The previous section looked at ways to involve the person in household activities adapted to suit their engagement, this section looks at stimulating activity ideas and has been categorised into the following topics:

- Games and Puzzles
- Arts and Crafts
- Reminiscence
- Sensory Engagement

Please be mindful that some of the games mentioned may no longer be appropriate for someone with advancing dementia. Some of the challenges in games can be good for stimulation yet some may be too difficult and could cause disappointment and frustration and may lead to feelings of low self-esteem. Some things to be considerate of are games that require strategic planning and are time pressured.

Games and Puzzles

You may already have a selection of board games, puzzles and cards in your home. These may be suitable and the person may need support playing. These games may be challenging if there are many stages to follow. Some companies have created familiar games considering these challenges and have made adapted versions. Some ideas are given below:

Jigsaws



Jigsaws are an enjoyable activity once at an appropriate level! A 1000-piece jigsaw may be too difficult to identify and organise, so ensure you have a size suitable. Jigsaws are a mental stimulation game that can improve feelings of well-being and increase satisfaction and achievement. Jigsaws can also promote communication and can support people who may be restless or anxious. Overall feel-good and meditative effect can also be achieved through completing a jigsaw. Active Minds have created jigsaws for people with memory problems please see at the back of the booklet where you can purchase these.

Board Games



Board games are a great activity that can involve the whole family. Some board games you have may still be appropriate to play, some may be too challenging for the person with dementia. Simple board games have been created for people with memory problems such as Snakes and Ladders and Ludo. See ideas below and at the back of the booklet for information where these can be purchased.

- **Snakes and Ladders** – a familiar game to so many from their childhood. This game may become challenging for a person with dementia, and they may need support playing or there are simplified versions created by Active-Minds which have a board less busy and easier to follow. These also have stronger colour contrasts which make it easy to identify.
- **Ludo** – again a familiar game to many, so likely more successful when completing. The adapted versions of the game have good colour contrast for people with cognitive and visual impairments and include cards with numbers instead of the dice for those who may find it difficult to roll and read the dice.
- **Draughts** – another option you may already have in your home and for some may be easy to follow and enjoy.
- **Call to Mind** – is a communication game that encourages and stimulates conversation. It is a game designed for people with dementia and can be used in nursing homes to learn more about the person or can be used at home with family.
- **Connect 4** – though not a board game could be one that a person with memory problems can still enjoy. This has good colour contrast, and challenges the person playing in planning and sequencing.
- **Dominoes** – a game that many know and enjoy.

Cards



There are so many card games to play with different degrees of ability required. For people with visual and cognitive impairments there are clear large cards for players, as well as card holders for people who have arthritis or simply need support viewing their cards. Consider some of the following games you and your family might enjoy.

- **Old Maid** – as this may be a familiar game from childhood it will be easier to play and recall. The aim is not to be the person with the last card in play, the queen!
- **Beggar My Neighbour** – this game will be good for someone who has previously played it in their past, you may need to run through the game to remind how to play.
- **Snap** – this is a fast paced game so may not be suitable for all, however it is familiar and participation can still be achieved.
- **Matching Games** – not using traditional cards rather cards with images, facing the cards down and turning two hoping to match. For people with dementia it can be adapted by reducing the number of cards in play.
- **Large Cards and Card holders** – these are available to purchase, information on these can be found at the back of the booklet.

Word Puzzles



Word puzzles are a great way to stimulate and work out the brain, there are simple puzzles available for free on download or books of simple puzzles can be purchased. You may need to engage with the person with dementia in completing the puzzle e.g. call out the clue, give time to the person and maybe add an extra clue to help them find the answer. See some ideas below.

- **Crossword** – try to find the right fit so the person can have a chance at getting the answers correctly. Where necessary ask the clue and add a clue if needed. Simple and themed versions are available for download at <https://dailycaring.com/free-large-print-crossword-puzzles-for-seniors/>
- **Word searches** – some people prefer these and they can become challenging to find so may not be suitable for everyone. You can find themed versions available for download such as Countries, please see <https://keepingbusy.com/learning-center/downloadable-dementia-activities/>
- **Finishing Lines** – is a book full of familiar and famous sayings, quotes, titles of films and musicals, proverbs with blanks for the person to fill in e.g. call out the following saying: it's raining cats and _____ or you're the apple of my _____. You could create your own.
- **Noughts and Crosses** – a simple and familiar pencil and paper game that some people may still enjoy.

Arts & Crafts



There are a wide range of arts and crafts activities easily available, these can be fun, creative and sensory. Ensure the activity you choose is meaningful and set at an appropriate level.

- **Homemade Play Dough** – you can either purchase the dough or make it together. You can add colour dye and essential oils such as lavender for a nice smell. Kneading and rolling or cutting into shapes can be repeatedly done with the playdough and can be stored and used regularly. You can also make salt dough to bake, see [here](#) or follow the link below for recipe from Activities to Share, once shape has been baked you can paint and decorate it.
- **Colouring & Painting** – there are many adult colouring and painting books now available. For many people colouring can provide opportunity to become engrossed in the activity and produce an end result which contributes to feelings of well-being and achievement.
- **Aqua Paints** – an adapted way to engage in painting; aqua paints are themed images and when water is applied produce the colours, when dry the colour will disappear allowing it to be reused.
- **Knitting** – this is a pastime enjoyed by many and sometimes given up for different reasons; this is not to say they cannot engage in knitting in some way. The person may need support to set up the activity, have this easily available and the wool ready on the needle. For those who enjoyed knitting before but can no longer engage in the activity, looking through knitting magazines and discussing patterns can promote communication and reminiscence.

- **Lace Threading** – if knitting or sewing is not an option maybe lace threading can be used instead. These can be bought at craft stops and online, or make your own (pierce holes into cardboard shapes and use a shoe lace). This is an activity that has no correct way of doing it and it's good for stimulating and focusing.
- **Scrapbook Making** – Using magazines that interest the person e.g. holiday destinations or trains. Look through and discuss the images, cut out images (either use safe scissors or have someone cut out), stick into scrapbook encouraging discussion around the topic.

Reminiscence



Reminiscence is an activity about sharing life stories and memories from the past that are positive and enjoyable. Often people with dementia remember the past more easily as it has been imbedded in their minds. Short term memory becomes challenging for the person with dementia so participating in reminiscent activities draws on the person's strength and promotes self-identity. This engagement can positively impact on the person's well-being and therefore on their day. Some ideas are given below that you can do at home together, please be mindful that some memories are not always positive and may be upsetting to recall.

- **Life Story Books** – are created together and are about the person's life including childhood, school days, friends and family life, working etc. Creating a life story book is a great activity that promotes conversations, draws memories out, and provides reassurance and confidence in the person's sense of self. You can use a scrap book or photo album and begin at the early days e.g. an image of the person as a baby, of the family or of the home they grew up in. Don't overcrowd the page with images, use a page per picture (depending on the size) and add some information e.g. the names of the people in the picture where, when etc. Simple clear writing, written in relation to the person e.g. photo of the family – this is me and my family, my mother and father and my brother John etc. The life story book is a great activity to create and you can learn more about the person through doing it. It is also a great resource to use daily or at times when a person is anxious or if they need to go to hospital – having the life story book can support and reassure the person. See <https://alzheimer.ie/living-with-dementia/i-am-a-carer-family-member/activities/>
- **Rummage/Memory Box** – this is another way to promote opportunity for meaningful engagement. Often people with dementia seek things throughout the house, looking for something to do and engage with. Creating a box full of interesting and meaningful things can support this and can be a resource to support conversation as well as a supportive tool for engaging with grandchildren. See <https://alzheimer.ie/living-with-dementia/i-am-a-carer-family-member/activities/>
- **Local Publications** – some local historical societies have created picture books of the history of the town and surrounding areas and can be a great resource to engage. Websites and apps support reminiscence. See [Apps](#) section for more information.

Apps

There are many apps now available that promote stimulation, challenge the brain and reminiscence. The following section outlines apps that might be suitable to use with people with dementia and have been divided into different sections for convenience.

Brain Training & Games



- **Elevate** – is a training programme that assesses the user first to determine skill level in the following: Writing, Listening, Reading, Speaking and Maths. Once set, daily sessions of training in the 5 areas are available. You can check and monitor your performance.
- **Hello Brain** – Trinity Dublin developed an app and website to challenge the brain in the major areas: brain training; socialising; physical activity and diet.
- **Luminosity** – designed to challenge memory, attention, and other cognitive abilities to boost brain function.
- **Word Search Puzzle** – you can do unlimited puzzles each day, the words can be found in different directions including backwards, which might be difficult for some.
- **Tetris** – this puzzle is enjoyable, fast and works on spatial awareness which will be challenging for some.

- **Word Search Puzzle** – you can do unlimited puzzles each day, the words can be found in different directions including backwards, which might be difficult for some.
- **Solitaire** – a card game that can be played online and is for one player, this will be useful for someone already familiar with it.
- **Jigsaw** – choose from a library of images and select size of jigsaw from 36 to 400 pieces.

Relaxation and Cultural Apps



- **Colorfy** – colouring is a great way to relax, this app has a large selection of images to colour including mandalas, garden, home and more to choose from.
- **Relax Radio** – this app has a selection of different relaxing stations including ambient, orchestras, lounge, relax and more.
- **Nature Scape Sounds** – a wide range of different sounds that are relaxing including, stream, birds, whales, rain, chimes and more.
- **Nature Live** – this is a website that has live streams of nature from different parts of the world. It has a many excellent videos and images of animals, including horses in Kentucky, pandas in China, Hawaii bay and beach [explore.org](https://www.explore.org)
- **Google Arts & Cultural** – features content from over 2000 museums and archives. You can even get views from famous sites like the top floor of the Eiffel Tower!

Reminiscence Apps



- **Irish Film Institute (IFI)** – this is a great app to browse old advertising shots, Irish cultural events, newsreels, travelogues, animation, public information films, home movies and documentaries.
- **Google Street View** – take a walk down memory lane! You can use street view of the familiar places, maybe places the person once lived in or famous places throughout the world.

Sensory Engagement

Many of the activities already shared will provide sensory engagement, there are further activities that require less concentration and can provide the person with the opportunity to participate and promote well-being. A selection of ideas for different levels of engagement have been provided below.



- **Audio Books** – some people may find it challenging to concentrate and read a book, many are now available to download or an audio version can be taken out from the library.
- **Music** – A great resource that can support a person who may be anxious, it can act as a reminiscent tool e.g. music from their youth. Encourage singing if they used to enjoy it, maybe songs from musicals or choirs. Also available on you tube and to stream of performances by live choirs.
- **Museum Tours** – many of the famous galleries from around the world have online viewing and tours. For art lovers this is a great way to view collections and engage in conversation. Please find a list of these virtual tours in the useful websites section of the booklet.
- **Movies and Musicals** – pull out home movies or musicals the person enjoys e.g. The Sound of Music or The King and I.

- **Hand Massage** – using aromatherapy such as lavender to massage hands and feet. This is relaxing and may support calm during anxious times.
- **Spa Day** – as well as a hand and foot massage, soak feet in basin of warm water, paint nails, brush hair, massage head gently, rub scented creams on arms, legs and face. Think of things the person likes including smells. Be mindful not everyone will enjoy this activity. Play some of the relaxation music ([see apps](#))
- **Scent Cards** – make cards or simply put spices and other scented things you can think of in a sealable bag to smell and discuss.
- **Sensory Box** – almost like the rummage box, fill it with fabric textures, scents including soaps, dried flowers and other sensory items you have, this may be useful to pull out at times to relieve anxiety.

The following are some sensory activities that have been created for people with advanced dementia and are available to buy online. Please see the back of the booklet for retailers of dementia products. Some of these items you may be able to create at home. Please be mindful of small pieces that may be easily detached.

- **Twiddle Muffs** – these are hand muffs that have many attachments to fiddle with. They are bright and colourful and can help keep hands busy.
- **Fidget Widget Toolkit** – helps keep hands busy. It has 5 specifically designed widgets with different motions including: spin, slide, twist, roll or turn. The motion is designed to help relax a person through repetitive movement.
- **Arthur the Musical Teddy Bear** – is a therapeutic teddy bear that can play music through the inbuilt MP3 player which can store 1000 songs. Arthur is comforting and has a little weight in his bottom to enhance the cuddle experience. Press his paw to play music. Good quality sound and texture.

Physical Activity



Taking part in sports and some outdoor activities such as walking can become challenging for a person with dementia. However there are activities that can be done at home that are less intensive. Being physically active is important for a healthy lifestyle and improves quality of life. Some benefits from physical activity are:

- Improves heart health
- Maintains strong muscle and joints
- Supports a good night sleep
- Enhances mood
- Stimulates the mind

Some at home physical activities:

- **Seated Exercise** – simple exercises to do while sitting can help flexibility and movement. Chairobics is a seated activity that works on upper and lower body movement. Please see the Getting Active for Better Health booklet for seated chair exercises <https://www2.hse.ie/file-library/health-eating-active-living/start-exercising-advice-on-how-to-get-active.pdf>
- **Siel Bleu** – have an online at home exercise guide for older adults <http://www.sielbleu.ie/home/at-home-guides/>

- **Seated Games** – there are many games that promote movement while sitting and are fun! Skittles and other target games require gentle movement and hand eye co-ordination. See information on target games at <https://mariasplace.com/target-games/>
- **Gardening & Housework** – some activities in the home provide workout opportunities as well. Please see household activities for ideas.

Useful Links and Further Information

Dementia: Understand Together

Is a public support, awareness and information campaign led by **HSE**, working with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and a coalition of over 40 national partner organisations and local community champions. It's aim is to create an Ireland that embraces and includes people living with dementia, and which displays solidarity with them and their families. To find out more about the campaign and how you can get involved visit www.understandtogether.ie

Activity Products

The following are a list of websites that sell activity products designed for people with dementia.

- www.murrays.ie
- www.jsdobbs.ie
- www.active-minds.org
- www.activitiestoshare.co.uk
- www.homecaremedicalsupplies.ie
- www.alzproducts.co.uk
- www.livebetterwith.com

Resource Website

- **Maria's Place** – is a website with a large resource of free activities in arts, cooking, and exercise, sensory and brain training <https://mariasplace.com/>



- **Daily Caring** – is an American website created to support family carers. It has a range of supports and activity resources www.dailycaring.com
- **Keeping Busy** – this website has a selection of free activity downloads: <https://keepingbusy.com/learning-center/downloadable-resources/>
- **Engaging Dementia** – Finding the Fun in Dementia, Reminiscence booklet <https://engagingdementia.ie/what-we-do/activity-resources/reminiscence/>
- **Catherine Daly's Dementia Friendly Activity Sheets** – <https://engagingdementia.ie/what-we-do/activity-resources/dementia-friendly-activity-sheets/>

Museum Tours and Cultural Websites

- **The National Gallery of Ireland** – <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/virtual-tour>
- **The JP Getty Museum** – <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/the-j-paul-getty-museum?hl=en>
- **The Vatican** – <http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/tour-virtuali-elenco.html>
- **The Natural History Museum London** – <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/natural-history-museum>
- **Paris Musée d'Orsay** – <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/from-station-to-the-renovated-mus%C3%A9-d-orsay/ARK7SK5T>
- **The British Museum** – <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/the-british-museum>
- **The National Gallery UK** – <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/visiting/virtual-tours/google-virtual-tour>
- **RTE Archives** - has collections and exhibitions of recordings and images of events. A great cultural and historic resource – <https://www.rte.ie/archives/>



Weekly Activity Planner



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			



dementia
under stand together



Icons by Flaticon.com



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