



## A-Z of Activities

### Sensory activities

Sensory activities are particularly important for people in the later stages of dementia. These stages are referred to as sensory and reflex activity levels (Pool 2012).

At a sensory activity level, a person will be focused on the sensation of moving and responding to different stimuli.

At a reflex activity level, a person may not be aware of their surroundings or at times of their own body. They benefit from direct, sensory stimulation.

*See the checklist on sensory activities for residents with dementia.*

What the activity can do for the residents	What do you need?	What to be aware of
<p><b>Movement</b> – this will vary depending on the context of the activity but range from minimal, such as holding an object, to very active, such as swaying to music.</p> <p><b>Sensory</b> – include all or any of the following: smell, awareness of body movement, touch, sight, hearing, taste.</p> <p><b>Emotional</b> – connecting with the environment and people.</p> <p><b>Cognitive</b> – memory; orientation; concentration; reminiscence.</p> <p><b>Social</b> – interaction and communication – verbal and non-verbal, smiling, laughing.</p>	<p><b>Facilities</b> This will vary depending on the activity.</p> <p><b>Staff/skills</b> You need to know each person's likes and dislikes and preferences.</p> <p>For people with dementia, understand their stage of dementia. You need to enter the person's world and be alongside the resident as they respond.</p> <p><b>Think creatively</b> Consider how activities can be adapted for residents. Take reading a newspaper or magazine: some people will enjoy reading, sharing opinions, selecting news stories; others may enjoy the sensation of turning the pages, noticing the pictures/ colours. Others may prefer throwing an aeroplane made from the paper or the sensation of being fanned.</p>	<p><b>For someone at the sensory activity level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak in short, simple sentences and demonstrate the action required.</li> <li>• Encourage single step activities such as brushing their hair or washing their face with a flannel.</li> </ul> <p><b>For a resident at the reflex activity level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise and a lot of movement can cause distress. A calm environment and activities that produce a single sensation work best.</li> <li>• Use one-word commands and gently guide the person. For example, placing a cup in the resident's hand and placing your hands over theirs and saying "hold"; guiding the cup to the resident's mouth and saying "drink".</li> </ul>



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### Sensory activities for people with dementia

- Rummaging – boxes or containers holding a range of objects such as everyday household objects, or items of interest such as workshop tools.
- Daily living activities that encourage helping ( for example, laying or clearing tables, wiping, drying cutlery, dusting and polishing brasses).
- Reminiscence boxes based on a range of topics.
- Work-type activities (for example, sanding, varnishing, sorting).
- Tasks that have familiar movements (for example, tearing, winding, folding).
- Activities that involve natural movement and music, dance.
- Dressing up, using props such as clothes, hats and accessories related to a theme or topic.
- Dolls and soft toys can trigger childcare and nurturing memories. Please talk with relatives in advance about this as it can appear childish and inappropriate.