

**Moving for Health Lesson Series**  
**Staying Active with Dementia**

## Active Ideas for Dementia: Help for Caregivers

A lot of attention is being given to the importance of being physically active now to maintain mental health later in life. However, often the importance of physical activity for persons already experiencing dementia is overlooked. Including physical activity in the daily routine for persons with dementia, specifically Alzheimer's disease, can be beneficial to overall health and well-being. The World Health Organization states that physical activity can help in the management of disorders such as depression and Alzheimer's disease. Activity as simple as casual walks can:

- Provide social and community connectedness.
- Reduce feelings of loneliness.
- Improve self-confidence and self-sufficiency.

Regular physical activity can improve heart health, muscle strength and flexibility. These benefits lead to an improved ability to move and maintain balance.

### General Guidelines for Physical Activities and Alzheimer's

- Use simple and easy to follow activities
- Make directions simple and avoid directions that require memory skills such as the words right or left
- Keep intensity very low for beginners
- Make sure participants keep breathing normally
- Stop and rest about every five minutes and have a conversation
- Watch closely for overexertion or fatigue
- Stop an activity if participants lose interest

### Household Chores for Activity

Household chores can provide both activity for the body and feelings of accomplishment for the participant. These chores can be developed into a daily routine. Choose tasks that are:

- Simple.
- Free of risk for injury.
- Include repetitive movements.



Activities might include:

- Setting a dinner table with napkins and placemats
- Raking leaves
- Dusting furniture
- Mopping floors
- Picking up sticks, pinecones or fallen fruit



### **Games for Activity**

Playing games together is a great activity for families and groups. It allows families to spend time together. Here are a few games that involve physical activity.

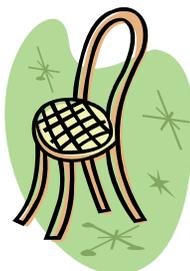
- **Bat the Ball**
  - Form a circle of players. Take an inflated beach ball and use your hands to bat it from one person to another.
- **Ball Pass**
  - Players should be seated or standing in a circle. A beach ball is passed to the person next to you. As you pass the ball, try to say that person's name.
- **Bucket Ball**
  - Players should be seated or standing in a circle. Place a bucket, empty trash can, or basket in the center of the circle. Players try to throw a medium sized rubber ball into the bucket. If the player makes it the caregiver gets the ball and rolls it back to the participant. If not, the ball goes to the next participant in the circle.

### **Exercises for Activity**

Physical activity can be included by using structured exercises. This can include exercises with endurance, strength and flexibility focus.

- **Walking**
  - Walking can be a great option for endurance activity and can allow you to get outside if the weather is nice. When walking with persons who have dementia:
    - Choose a peaceful, quiet path.
    - Try to go the same time each day.
    - Use the same entrance door each time.
    - Take the same route each day.
  - When the weather is bad try walking indoors to music, or use an indoor area during quieter times like a store in the early morning.

- Resistance training
  - Resistance training builds muscle strength which can be lost through the natural aging process. Try the following activities:
    - Passing a weighted ball to each other around a circle
    - Half squats using a chair for support and balance
    - Exercise bands or tubes
  
- Flexibility exercises
  - Flexibility allows the joints to move through their full range of motion. This can make daily activities less of a challenge to perform.
  
  - A full body stretch that addresses all major muscle groups can improve flexibility. Be sure to:
    - Warm up the muscles before stretching.
    - Ease into the stretch and hold.
    - Hold each stretch for 30 seconds.
    - Perform each stretch at least four times.
  
- Chair exercises
  - Chair exercises can include all three types of training. When done with a more advanced group at a faster pace, the heart rate can be slightly elevated which makes it an endurance activity. Strength and flexibility can also be addressed by reaching and lifting the arms and legs. All of the exercises below are performed from a seated position and require a slow, controlled movement. Perform each exercise 8 to 12 times.
    - Reach for the Floor
      - Sit up straight with arms straight down at sides
      - Bend forward towards the floor and hold (participants do not need to touch the floor just reach towards it)
      - Slowly return to the starting position
  
    - Kick It Up
      - Sit up straight with feet flat on the floor
      - Extend one leg out in front of you as if kicking a ball
      - Hold the leg out for two seconds
      - Return the leg to starting position, rest and then raise the opposite leg



- Seated March
  - Sit up straight with feet flat on the floor
  - Keeping the knee bent, slowly raise one foot off the ground
  - Return the foot to the floor and raise the opposite foot as if in a slow marching motion
  - Rest often and perform very slowly
  
- Reach High
  - Sit up straight with arms at sides
  - Slowly extend the arms up to shoulder level
  - Slowly continue to extend the arms over the head
  - In the same motion, return to the starting position

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#### Prepared by:

Lori L. Rice, M.S., C.N.

Extension Associate for Health

University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension HEEL Program

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