

5 TIPS for caregivers

ACTIVITIES FOR ALZHEIMER'S

With winter weather comes many things – a pretty dusting of snow, hot chocolate with marshmallows, and lots (and lots!) of indoor time. Freezing temperatures can easily make you go stir crazy, especially when trying to also care for and entertain a loved one with dementia. It's easy to just default to watching TV all day, but by varying the types of activities you engage in, it really can still be the great indoors for everyone!

1 Thinking Activities.

The beauty of a TV movie marathon? You don't have to think. While this can certainly be fun on the occasional snow day, it's good to engage your loved one in thinking activities to keep their minds engaged. Activities could include puzzles, games, or even reading a favorite book. These activities can be challenging, but they should be geared appropriately for your loved one so they don't become too frustrating. For those that are in the early stages, do the crossword puzzle together to help with tough clues. Jigsaw puzzles with fewer pieces can be a good option as the disease progresses. Reminiscence is also a good example of a thinking activity, especially as your loved one advances in the disease. Look through photo albums, listen to familiar music, or tell family stories from the past to engage your loved one. Even if they are unable to contribute, the familiar faces can still trigger past memories and promote engagement.

2 Physical Activities.

Another problem with the TV marathon? You end up sitting all day. While it may be more difficult to be active indoors, it is certainly not impossible! Winter can cut outdoor walks short, but consider walking on a treadmill or using a stationary bike if your loved one is physically able. Chair exercises are a natural indoor activity; consider arm and leg strengthening or stretching movements. It's also easy to turn on a favorite song and dance in the living room! With a little creativity, you can make sure your loved one – and you! – get a little bit of exercise indoors!

3 Social Activities.

While you may consider yourself BFF with all of your closest friends on TV, seeing people in the real world is important too! Winter weather can make travelling more difficult, but try to get out to see family and friends when the weather permits. Engaging in social conversation is not just fun, but also good for the mind as well! Just make sure to keep visits short if your loved one tires easily, and try to time things with their schedule – not during a regular nap time or too late into the evening. And if you can't get out? Talk on the phone with friends or even schedule some Skype time! Hearing familiar voices and seeing familiar faces is fun for everyone.

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4 Chores!

You may not think about doing chores as an activity, but helping around the house is certainly beneficial for both you and your loved one! Chores may not seem fun, but your loved one may actually value this time to help out and feel that they are needed. And of course there is the added benefit of keeping your loved one engaged while also getting things done around the house. Consider activities like folding the laundry, setting the table, or feeding the pets. Things like sweeping or vacuuming can help get a little exercise in if your loved one is able. If your loved one is more advanced in the disease, have them help sort items – socks, silverware, even a junk drawer. Even if there is a blue sock with a white one, or a few forks mixed in with the spoons, at least everything is still put away!

5 Creative Activities.

If you've done all the chores, it might be time for something fun! Creative activities are a great way to engage your loved one, stimulate their mind, and provide new ways of communication. Activities include painting, a craft project, playing or singing along to music, creative writing or even acting out a favorite play. These activities can of course vary greatly, depending on your loved ones' interests. Some may balk at picking up a paintbrush, but they might enjoy trying to build something with their hands. If they don't enjoy singing, perhaps just listening to a favorite song and tapping along to the beat. Creative activities can be as large as making a quilt together, or as small and temporary as building a house out of cards. Just remember that creative activities are just that – creative. The final art piece doesn't have to be a Van Gogh, as long as your loved one enjoys the process.



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