

About you... keeping involved and active

If you have been diagnosed with dementia, this help sheet may be useful. It discusses the importance of keeping involved and active and suggests ways that you can do this.

Changes

As people get older, activities they once enjoyed may change. The hobbies and interests you had when you were in your twenties and thirties may be quite different to ones that you enjoy now. Retirement can also be a time when new hobbies or pastimes are taken up, or old interests rekindled.

Experiencing changes with memory loss and dementia can also mean change in the activities you take part in. If you have trouble remembering or expressing yourself, your confidence may be down a little. You may feel embarrassed about memory loss or not being able to do things as well as you used to.

Making activities easier

However, keeping involved and active in the things you enjoy is extremely important. Rather than giving up activities that are becoming difficult, it may be possible to modify the activity. For example, one man was having trouble keeping his golf score. He felt embarrassed and thought about stopping playing altogether, but he decided to modify things by asking his partner to keep the score. Sometimes he decided not to keep the score at all. These changes meant that he was able to keep on playing the game he loved.

Breaking an activity down into smaller parts may also help. Even if you can't manage all the steps, you may be able to take part in some of them. For example, if you are having trouble preparing a meal, rather than completely stopping, you may be able to do some parts of it, such as peeling the vegetables, setting the table or serving up the meal.

It often helps to talk to others – they may be able to help you work out how to keep doing things.

Physical activities

- Physical activity is important for maintaining fitness and keeping muscles and joints flexible. Physical activity triggers “feel good” chemicals in the body, which can help reduce depression and anxiety.
- Physical activities might include walking, gardening, mowing the lawn, golf, bowls, tennis, exercise classes, stretching exercises at home, yoga or tai chi.

Mental activities

- Many people find it helpful to keep their mind stimulated by keeping active the parts of the brain that are functioning well.
- Mental activities that people enjoy include doing crosswords, playing scrabble, reading, doing jigsaw puzzles, arithmetic exercises or games. Keeping involved in activities around the house as much as possible can also be a way to keep the mind stimulated.

Creative activities

- Many people find creative hobbies very enjoyable. This might include knitting, embroidery, woodwork, sewing, painting or drawing, playing a musical instrument or simply listening to music.
- Again, if you are having trouble with something you enjoy, rather than giving up completely, it may be possible to simplify it. For example, if you enjoy knitting, it may be possible to continue using less complex patterns than you have been used to. Sometimes a family member or friend may be able to help with an activity, perhaps helping to get you started so that you can continue on your own. Or they may be able to help you throughout, so that you both enjoy the activity together.

Social activities

- Some people have enjoyed social activity through their lives, and others have preferred to be “home bodies” and have not sought out social interactions. If you enjoy social contact it is important to keep this up as much as possible.
- Social activity might include involvement in groups such as Rotary, Probus, Over 50s or senior citizens clubs. Visits to friends, card or coffee groups, or spending time with family may also be rewarding.
- Some people with dementia find that being among large groups of people can be overwhelming. Too much noise or activity can create anxiety or confusion. It may be that you aim to be with one or two other people to continue gaining pleasure from social gatherings, rather than being with a large group of people.

Spirituality

- Spirituality can mean more than religion or church. It can relate to anything that gives meaning or peace to our lives.
- For many people their spirituality is an important strength in dealing with dementia. Maintaining religious involvement may be helpful. If you find going to your place of worship overwhelming, a representative may be able to visit you at home, or there may be a quieter time you could choose.
- For some people, a sense of spirituality may be gained from meditation, appreciating art, enjoying a sunset, walking along the beach, or spending time with family. It is very important to keep enjoying anything that gives meaning to your life or provides a sense of pleasure or peace.

A sense of humour

- Keep laughing. Sharing your sense of humour is an excellent way of releasing tension as well as giving and contributing in everyday life.

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Visit livingwellwithdementia.org.au to learn more about living well with dementia.

Further Information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**