A Client Care Module:

ACTIVITIES FOR CLIENTS WITH ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

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A Client Care Module: Activities for Clients with Alzheimer’s Disease

DECREASE THE FOUR As OF ALZHEIMER’S

Think of all the things you do to relax, to stay fit, to feel pleasure, to satisfy your curiosity and to learn new things. These are your preferred activities. The activities you choose play a key role in your quality of life.

People who have Alzheimer’s disease need access to activities too. And just like everyone else, their activities should be a reflection of their skills, abilities and interests.

The research is clear—appropriate activities have a positive effect on the behaviors associated with Alzheimer’s disease. Investigators have found that appropriate activities decrease agitation and negative emotions, while increasing positive emotion.

People with AD who have regular opportunities to engage in preferred activities have less of the “Four As of Alzheimer’s”: Anxiety, Aggression, Agitation, and Apathy.

Keep in mind, the definition of “activity” is loose and it changes as the person progresses through the stages of Alzheimer’s. In general, an activity is:

Anything that keeps a person interested, busy, or in any way engaged, physically or mentally.

Keep reading to learn all about the activities you can do with your clients and their loved ones in all stages of Alzheimer’s disease. You’ll end up with a long list of activities from which you can choose, and you’ll get some great tips on making activities successful, pleasurable and safe for everyone!
## THE BENEFITS OF ACTIVITY

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
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| **Physical Activity**<br>Examples: Walking, stretching, cleaning house. | • Reduces the risk of developing chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.  
• Can help manage high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, or high cholesterol, if present.  
• Improves ability to function and stay independent.  
• Extends life. People who exercise live longer!  
• Improves mood and relieves depression.  
• Improves strength, balance, and coordination.  
• Lowers risk of falls and injury.  
• Improves quality of sleep. |
| **Mental Activity**<br>Examples: Simple puzzles, reading together, reminiscing. | • Increases blood circulation in the brain.  
• Stimulates memory.  
• Improves mental focus.  
• Improves self esteem.  
• Improves mood and relieves depression.  
• Enhances creativity. |
| **Sensory Activity**<br>Examples: Any activity that stimulates the five senses (smell, sight, taste, touch, and hearing). | • Helps root the person in the present.  
• Decreases agitation and restlessness.  
• Improves sleep.  
• Provides improved quality of life for the patient and the caregiver. |

### The Facts

Activities can help pass the time and be a fun way for people to maintain function. **Here are some added benefits to staying active:**

• It can be entertaining.
• It provides a distraction.
• It promotes communication.
• It almost always has a therapeutic value.
• It stimulates thinking and creativity.
• It improves the quality of life.

**Beneficial activities can be:**

• **Planned**...like a weekly outing to church.
• **Spur-of-the-moment**...like singing along with a song on the radio.
• **Daily**...like getting dressed.
• **Occasional**...like going out to eat.

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**WHAT’S NEW?**

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn’t know before. Share this new information with your co-workers!
OVERCOMING COMMON BARRIERS

Getting your client with Alzheimer’s disease (or other dementia) to participate in activities may be easier said than done! There are a few common barriers you may need to overcome! For example, placing items, like a puzzle or art supplies, in front of the person with Alzheimer’s may not bring the joyful smile you had hoped for. Instead, it may create confusion, agitation, or anxiety.

Here are some ways you can help:

- **Resistance happens.** If your client strongly resists an activity, it may be because he or she can’t do it—or fears doing it. There’s no point in forcing the activity in this case.
- **Get the activity started.** Your client may have desire to do the activity you present, but may lack the ability to start or carry out the task.
- **Demonstrate.** Show the person how to perform the activity by providing simple, one-step directions.
- **Provide help when things become difficult.** For example, during a housekeeping activity, you may discover that your client can expertly sweep the floor. Then, you may find that she is unable to coordinate holding the dustpan and the broom at the same time to pick up the dirt. You can hold the dustpan down on the floor and give a simple instruction, like, “okay, now sweep the dirt into here”.
- **Focus on the process, not the result.** Does it really matter if there are still toast crumbs under the table? No! You can go back later and finish the job when your client is busy with something else. All that matters is that the person did the activity and feels useful.
- **Let old habits shape the routine.** You may notice that at certain times of the day, your client seems to feel the need to do routine things. For example, she may start to set the table before dinner or sweep the kitchen floor mid-morning. Don’t resist or restrict these urges. Instead, plan these activities as part of the daily routine. It helps her maintain her sense of purpose.
- **You may need to pull a complete 180!** You might assume that a person who was a professional artist all her life would choose painting as a preferred activity. But, that’s not always the case. A professional artist may become frustrated by the inability to produce quality work as the symptoms of Alzheimer’s progress. Instead of sticking to the familiar, this client might enjoy a new opportunity for self expression.
- **Offer support and supervision.** Realizing that they can’t perform routine life skills and activities can really damage your client’s self-esteem. If you see your client struggling or becoming frustrated, simply show him how to perform the activity in a calm, matter-of-fact way. Speak to him like an adult and let him know you are confident that he can succeed.

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**Recall This!**

**THE STAGES OF ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE**

Understanding the stages of AD is an important part of choosing appropriate activities. Here’s a refresher on the stages:

**During the Early Stage of AD** the person may have poor concentration, a short attention span, trouble making decisions, and short-term memory problems.

As the disease progresses to the **Middle Stage**, early problems worsen, and you may also see episodes of getting lost, problems with speech and following directions, and trouble sleeping at night.

During the **Late Stage**, you’ll find loss of balance and ability to walk, loss of short and long-term memory and speech, and an inability to perform basic skills such as eating or drinking.
ADLS ARE ACTIVITIES!

WHAT ARE ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING (ADLs)?

ADLs are those essential activities everyone must do on a daily basis, including:

- Eating.
- Bathing.
- Getting in and out of a bed or a chair.
- Toileting.
- Walking.
- Getting outside.
- Dressing.

As Alzheimer’s disease progresses, there is a steady decline in the ability to perform activities of daily living. Performing ADLs can be a great way for your AD client to get some physical, mental, and sensory activity without even knowing it!

TIPS FOR INCORPORATING ADLs INTO YOUR CLIENT’S DAY

- Encourage your clients to assist with their own personal care as much as possible. Lifting an arm to brush their own hair is a form of exercise. So is getting dressed and bending over to wash their own feet.
- Give simple directions, one step at a time for any activity.
- Ask “yes” or “no” questions. For example, instead of “Which shirt would you like to wear?” try “Do you want to wear your blue shirt today?”
- Pay attention to body language. For example, if your client seems agitated, it may not be the best time to ask her to sit and brush her hair.
- Tell your supervisor if you think your clients could be more independent in their activities—if they only had certain items. For example, Mr. Lawson can dress himself if he has slip-on pants and shirts without buttons.

MAKE IT COUNT!

It may be easier and faster for you to do everything for your clients, but if you do, you are taking away important activities and helping to create dependence.

For example: Mrs. Smith tries to do her own personal care. But, she stops every few minutes to remember what she’s doing, especially when she brushes her teeth and puts on her shoes. You hate to “waste time” waiting for her to finish, so you do it for her. After a few weeks, Mrs. Smith loses interest in caring for herself. She begins to feel helpless and shows signs of depression.

Assist your clients when you are ordered to and when common sense tells you to.

For example:

- Always help your AD clients in and out of the bathtub.
- Monitor the use of sharp items, like razors for shaving.
- Stay close by when your AD client walks up and down stairs or on uneven surfaces.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Safety comes first . . . but don’t “do” for your clients just because you are in a hurry.
A CLOSER LOOK AT PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Examples of physical activities your client may be able to do include:

- Walking (indoor or out).
- Stretching.
- Yoga or Tai Chi.
- Seated Exercises (see side bar).
- Dancing (can be done in a chair).
- Lifting light weights (like soup cans).
- Shopping.
- Light housework.
- Light gardening.
- Active or passive range of motion exercises.

THE NEXT STEP!

SEATED EXERCISES

Your client does not have to be a star athlete to get some exercise! In fact, there are things he can do right in his chair. Here are a few seated exercises:

- Marching feet.
- Turning the body from side to side.
- Raising the heels, then toes.
- Clapping under the legs.
- Bicycling the legs.
- Making circles with the arms. (Forward, then backward.)
- Raising the opposite arm and leg, then switch.
- Practicing moving from sitting to standing (if allowed).

If your client has trouble following simple directions, sit in a chair beside him and demonstrate the exercise. Ask him to do what you are doing.

TIPS FOR INCORPORATING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTO EACH CLIENT’S DAY

- Most people need about 30 minutes of activity at least five days a week. This can be broken up into shorter sessions throughout the day. For example, you might take your client on a 15 minute walk in the morning and then have her do some sort of housework or gardening tasks in the afternoon.

- Encourage your clients to perform “useful” tasks such as emptying waste baskets, dusting or folding laundry.

- Your clients may be more eager to walk if you make it fun. Promise to sing to them as they walk or use that time to tell a few jokes or to talk about the day’s news headlines.

- Pay attention to body language. For example, if your client seems to want to walk and pace then sweeping the floor would be a better activity choice than sitting down to sort socks.

- Dancing can be a great exercise. If your clients enjoy music, encourage them to move to the beat—even if it’s just tapping their toes. Some movement is better than none at all!

- Make sure you know how much physical activity is allowed for your client.

- For bed or chair-bound clients, ask your supervisor if you’re allowed to perform range-of-motion exercises.

- Keep your clients’ safety in mind at all times. Make sure they use any assistive equipment that has been ordered for them, such as a cane or walker.
MENTAL ACTIVITIES MATTER!

Examples of mental activities your client may be able to do include:

- Reminiscing (talk about old times, watch family videos, look at family photographs).
- Reading together (books, magazines, newspapers, or internet blogs on subjects that interest your client).
- Cooking together (mash potatoes, stir batter or shuck corn).
- Sorting objects by color, shape or type. For example, sorting socks, cards by suit or spoons by size.
- Completing puzzles (word search, and jigsaw puzzles).
- Listening to music (can include singing, dancing, and playing a simple instrument).
- Going through “Sensory Boxes” (see side bar).

**TIPS FOR INCORPORATING MENTAL ACTIVITY INTO YOUR CLIENT’S DAY**

- Remembering the past gives people a way to show who they are, what they’ve accomplished in their lives, and a chance to relive happy times. For people with Alzheimer’s Disease, it is a way to talk easily about things they do remember.
- Ask about family photos your client keeps. Encourage your client to tell you about the school he attended or what he did for a living.
- Consider reading the day’s newspaper headlines or one interesting article from the newspaper to your client.
- Talk to your clients about crafts and hobbies. Ask them what they would enjoy doing. But, be sure you check with your supervisor before providing clients with craft materials—especially scissors, glue, and paint. Some clients need to be supervised when working with these items.
- Helping out in the kitchen can include putting groceries away (where they belong), creating a meal plan, or choosing recipes out of cookbooks.
- Play simple word games. For example, you might ask your client, “What’s the opposite of up?” Or try a simple game of charades. Mimic an activity like eating or writing and see if your client can guess what you are doing.

**THINK ABOUT IT!**

**MEMORY BOXES**

Develop themed memory boxes to stimulate memories and begin conversations. Ideas are endless, but here are some suggestions:

- Under the Sea
- Trains
- A Picnic
- Any Holiday
- Colors: Red, Blue, Green, Black, etc.
- Wedding

**Here’s what you’ll do:**

- Fill the box with as many items as you can find that are associated with the theme.
- Bring the items out one at a time and allow your client to touch and describe the object.
- Serve something to eat or drink that is related to the theme.
- Have a simple craft to go with the theme.
FOCUS ON THE FIVE SENSES

During the later stages of Alzheimer’s disease, most clients become totally dependent. They lose the ability to communicate, walk, and feed themselves. But even at this stage, quality of life is very important — and there are some “activities” that you can still do with them. The key is to focus on the five senses! Here are a few suggestions:

### Chai Tea Sensory Activity

Use this activity to stimulate your client’s senses!

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 6 whole cardamom pods, lightly crushed
- 6 whole cloves
- 1 (1-inch) piece fresh ginger root, peeled and sliced
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 single-serve black tea bags

Milk and honey to serve.

**Instructions:**
Let clients feel and smell the spices. Ask if they remember using any of these.
Bring the 5 spices and 3 cups water to a boil. Remove from heat, set aside for 10 minutes.
Talk about the smell and how it might taste.
After 10 minutes, add tea, let steep for 3 to 5 minutes.
Strain through a mesh, discarding solids. Pour tea into cups and serve with milk and honey.

*Discuss how the tea tastes, smells, and feels.*

### What Can You See?
- A bird feeder at the window
- Fish tanks
- Wind Socks and Pennants
- A digital picture frame
- Wall Clocks – even if you feel they cannot tell time
- Mobiles for Their Rooms

### Good Things to Touch
- Pet Therapy (dogs, cats & rabbits to touch)
- Dolls & Stuffed Animals
- Fuzzy blanket or pillow
- Activity Aprons, Blankets and Pillows
- Jewelry Box, with large broaches, watches, belt buckles, etc.
- Hand Massage with Scented Lotions
- Hugs

### What’s that Smell?
- Aroma Therapy, lavender recommended
- Scented LED Candles (battery operated)
- Scented Hand Lotions
- Cooking Smells (Bread and Pies)

### Mmmm, that Tastes Good!
- Familiar Foods from Childhood
- Comfort Foods
  - Sweet treats (if allowed)
  - Sucking on a Lollipop can comfort someone who is upset.
  - Cold Ice Cream or Popsicles
  - Small Sips of Carbonated Drink
- See the Side Bar for a Chai Tea Activity to do with Clients.

### Listen to the Sounds
- Favorite Music
- Wind Chimes
- Sound Machines with CDs that play nature sounds.
- A real rain shower
SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES WITH FAMILY AND CHILDREN

Being around children can be fun for some clients with Alzheimer’s disease. It may bring back happy memories and provides a sense of belonging. It helps the person remember how to love and be loved.

Here are some things your client might enjoy doing with family:

- Play a simple board game.
- Read stories or books.
- Walk in the park.
- Go to a school event.
- Talk about fond memories from childhood.

Encourage your clients’ families to bring children for visits, but it’s usually best to limit the activity to an hour or two. The kids’ energy level may wear out elderly clients!

SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES

People with AD have the same spiritual needs as everyone else. Talk to your client or his family members about his spiritual life. Find out if he went to church or prayed regularly. Ask about his particular religion and learn about any special customs or holidays associated with it.

For many elderly people, the church is the largest source of social support aside from family and it is the most common source for social interaction.

Here are some tips for helping a person with AD who has spiritual needs:

- Invite church members or volunteers from the same faith to visit with your client. This can help him feel connected and remember pleasant times.
- Involve the person in spiritual activities that he or she has known well. These might include worship, religious or other readings, sacred music, prayer, and holiday rituals.
- Play religious or other music that is important to the person. It may bring back old memories. Even if the person with AD has a problem finding the right words to speak, he or she still may be able to sing songs or hymns from the past.

LOOK OUT!

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

Depression is common in people with Alzheimer’s, especially during the early and middle stages.

- It’s estimated that up to 40 percent of people with Alzheimer’s disease suffer from depression.

Identifying depression in someone with AD can be tough because they both cause some of the same symptoms. For example, both can cause:

- Loss of interest
- Social withdrawal
- Trouble concentrating

The good news is that depression in a person with Alzheimer’s may be less severe, may not last as long, and the symptoms may come and go.

If you observe symptoms of depression in your AD client, discuss your concerns with your supervisor. Treatment is available and can make a significant difference in quality of life.
THE POWER OF MUSIC

Plenty of research is going on right now to measure the benefits of using iPods (or other mp3 playing devices) with personalized playlists for people suffering from dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

Listening to preferred music though personal headphones has had a major, positive impact on everyone who uses them. Many residents in the studies have come off their anxiety medications and have decreased combative and depressive behaviors.

Not convinced? Go to musicandmemory.org and look around. You’ll find research on the connection between music and the brain. Then watch a video or two. You’ll see for yourself how music transforms people with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. Be prepared to cry!

Don’t have access to an iPod? Ask family members to give their loved ones an iPod (or other mp3 player) as a gift or to donate an older model that is no longer being used.

⇒ An iPod Shuffle (or similar device) is a good choice since it has very few buttons, no display screen, and is easy to learn how to operate.

⇒ Here’s another solution. Most smart phones can store and play music through headphones too. Or, you can download free apps like Pandora or Spotify and stream free music through the phone.

⇒ Be sure to include the client and/or the family members in building the playlist. The wrong choice of music can make the whole technique backfire.

⇒ Larger, padded headphones that rest on the sides of the head and ears will be more comfortable than small ear buds that go inside the ears.

Here’s what some users have to say:

“Our residents have improved mood, brighter affect, increased socialization, etc. They tend to verbalize and sing more after listening to their iPod.”

~ Melissa Lien,
Long Island State Veterans Home, Stony Brook, N.Y.

“One gentleman who had a diagnosis of failure to thrive actually gained weight and began taking an interest in the world after he started using the device.”

Janice Chiampa,
Genesis Healthcare, Andover, Mass.
FINAL THOUGHTS: 101 ACTIVITIES FOR CLIENTS WITH DEMENTIA OR ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Having trouble thinking up new activities to do with your clients? Keep this list with you at all times. There’s something for everyone, in every stage of AD on this list!

1. Vacuum
2. Dust tables
3. Bake cookies
4. Read newspaper
5. Invite children to visit
6. Read a letter out loud
7. Listen to music
8. Sensory boxes
9. Color / Draw
10. Make lemonade
11. Wipe countertops
12. Weed the garden
13. Make soup
14. Name that Tune
15. Readers Digest
16. Fold clothes
17. Pet visit
18. Cut out cards
19. Wash silverware
20. Bake bread
21. Sort objects
22. Sing Christmas songs
23. Life review
24. Organize junk drawer
25. Make a collage
26. Sing old songs
27. Take a ride
28. Make a pie
29. Read a poem
30. Dye Easter eggs
31. Sort socks
32. Take a walk
33. String fruit loops
34. String beads
35. Make Chai tea
36. Look at photos
37. Reminisce
38. Clip coupons
39. Sort poker chips
40. Count things
41. Fold towels
42. Afternoon Tea
43. Play cards
44. Do chair exercises
45. Play charades
46. Paint
47. Cut out paper dolls
48. Identify states and capitols
49. Make a family tree
50. Take photos
51. Make PB&J Sandwich
52. Make leaf rubbings
53. Water house plants
54. Reminisce about first kiss
55. Beanbag toss
56. Dance
57. Sing a hymn
58. Eat ice cream
59. Plant bulbs
60. Make cards
61. Sort cards by suit
62. Write a letter
63. Dress-up fancy
64. Pop popcorn
65. Name the U.S. Presidents
66. Give a manicure
67. Music, movement & props
68. Plant a tree
69. Wrap gifts
70. Finish a famous saying
71. Feed the ducks
72. Play with play dough
73. Read picture books
74. Put a simple puzzle together
75. Sand wood
76. Rub on hand lotion
77. Decorate place mats
78. Arrange fresh flowers in a vase
79. Remember famous people
80. Rake leaves
81. Make a fruit salad
82. Sweep the patio
83. Talk about famous events
84. Recall nursery rhymes
85. Write down recipes
86. Count squirrels, birds, trees outside window
87. Make and fly paper airplanes
88. Take care of bird cage/fish tank
89. Trace/cut leaves
90. Simple trivia questions
91. Finish Bible quotes
92. Finger paint
93. Cut out pictures
94. Read/listen to a short story
95. Put coins in a jar
96. Sew sewing cards
97. Put seed in bird feeder
98. Clean out pumpkin
99. Roll yarn
100. Reminisce about vacation
101. Make a cake

Add your own ideas:

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List of 101 Activities adapted from Dementia Today at www.dementiatoday.com/have-fun-today-101-activities-for-alzheimers-loved-ones