



Enhancing the life of the Older adult with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias : Some gift ideas

Sadly, the incidence of Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias increases with age. While a small number of cases occur before age 65, the incidence increases with age. At 85 and above, 48% of us will be affected by Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. Alzheimer's disease and other dementias all progress in a similar manner, although some cause more rapid decline than others. For the sake of simplicity the dementias will be referred to AD.

The symptoms of AD are, for the most part, similar in everyone. The affected person loses his memory starting with recent memory and moving gradually back in time. Early in the disease, people with AD will also lose cognitive ability (the ability to figure out a cheque book, or how to take a bus from point to point, and being aware of their own safety needs). The loss of memory and cognitive skills as well as development of confusion continues over the course of the illness which can last up to 15 years or more.

Most people with AD are fairly mobile and able to participate in some kind of activity for at least a few years. Gifts which promote activities have the potential to improve the person's quality of life, provided that they are carefully selected to match the functional level of the person with AD. The following suggestion has been divided into gifts for early stage dementia, the moderately impaired and the severely impaired. These are only a handful of ideas from which to choose.

Please contact the DEMENTIA SA Office

Support | Awareness | Education | Counseling | Training | Resource centre | Advocacy
info@dementiasa.org or support@dementiasa.org www.dementiasa.org

National Helpline 0860 MEMORY / 0860 636 679



Ref. images.theage.com

Early Alzheimer's and Related Dementia

Most individuals at this stage are: able to communicate fairly well, quite active and need to be engaged in some activity 60% of the day. They are aware of their condition and struggle to remain independent. Gifts that enhance independence or encourage activity are excellent choices.

Games: Simple, but familiar games, such as dominos, large numbered cards, an invitation to a Bingo game (be prepared to watch over your guest's card). Low priced items, but they have potential for quite a bit of enjoyment.

Tickets to a concert, musical, circus. Ball games can also be excellent choices. Any event without a plot to follow is a good choice. For safety either take the person or send along a companion.

Taxi charge account for transportation to visit friends (co-ordinate plans on both sides of the trip). This gives the person a sense of freedom and independence when they can no longer drive.

Old family photographs highlighting the major events in the person's life. Useful and enjoyable throughout the course of dementia. Fruit basket or flowers are always a welcome gift.

- ***Old family photographs highlighting the major events in the person's life.***

For the Moderately Impaired

Persons with moderate stage AD will have some difficulty communicating, will need help dressing and be unable to manage most daily activities without supervision or help. Wandering is often seen in this group.

Exercise is important but attention spans vary so activities are best limited to fifteen minutes.

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- Simple to manage clothing. Tube socks are easy to put on correctly. Shoes are available with Velcro closures since shoelaces can be a problem. Jumpsuits with back closures for those with incontinence problems are very good choices.
- Materials to sort. Sorting is an activity that most people with AD can enjoy. Try pennies and penny folders, a bag of buttons or large beads.
- Music. Especially the old songs often can bring back wonderful memories. Try to locate stores that have remakes of old albums. Also religious music or music of their country of birth can bring great pleasure.
- Tape Church or religious services. Many people with dementia can no longer attend religious services. This can bring a great source of comfort.
- Short car trips. See Christmas lights, flowers, seasonal changes.

The Severely Impaired

At this level the person has almost no understanding of the spoken word and is unable to speak coherently. Attention span is very short. In this stage of the disease people do not have the capacity to deal with anything but the simplest of tasks.

Often times their long term memory takes them into the back and they may believe they are living in the home or community of their younger years...

Photo albums, family pictures, memory books. A gather of pictures from the person's past can help if any memory is still intact.

Pet visits. Most people with late dementia still enjoy the visits of dogs, cats and other small animals.

Recordings of old music

Cuddly animals or even a lifelike cuddly baby doll.

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Hand/body lotions. Most people with late stage AD still derive comfort from touch. Try giving a hand or body massage. (Do not massage legs, as blood clots can form in this population).

These are just a few ideas that may bring pleasure to those with AD during the holidays and on special occasions.

By Stephanie Zeman RN MSN

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