



"Stress Reducers for Dementia," by Pam Leonard, LBSW

It is said that there are four A's that accompany Alzheimer's disease: anxiety, aggression, agitation, and apathy. If you have provided care for a loved one who suffers from this disease, you may have witnessed these behaviors as a result of the stress your loved one has experienced, especially as they begin to lose their abilities to remember, plan, communicate, and care for themselves.

Research is showing that one way to alleviate stress and unwanted behaviors that accompany Alzheimer's disease and other dementias is to keep our loved ones engaged through physical, mental, and social activities.

In the early stages of Alzheimer's disease the memory and planning portions of your brain are the first to be affected. However, the parts of the brain that are involved in emotion and aesthetic appreciation remain intact much longer. Therefore, **activities such as art and music therapy** help to express feelings when our family members can no longer use their words to express their feelings.

Physical activity, such as walking, movement classes, and chair yoga, has not only been linked to preventing Alzheimer's but studies suggest it is also helpful at slowing the progression of Alzheimer's disease for those who have been participating in a physical exercise throughout their older adult life.

We often get caught up in wanting to help our loved ones remember the details and events that are going on around us, the recent past or plans for the future. Our energy is better spent helping them to walk down memory lane and encourage them to share stories from yesteryear not yesterday. This can be done individually or in a group setting. **The socialization of a group** setting still gives our loved ones a sense of the feelings that come about from being a part of the community and laughing with friends.

Everyone wants to feel needed... including those affected by Alzheimer's disease or other memory care disorders. I witnessed this while caring for my grandmother. While in the hospital she refused to cooperate and kept fidgeting with the sheets as if she was trying to fold them. We decided to distract her by giving her some towels to fold. The response was amazing. She would complete the stack; we would carry it out of sight to again mess up the towels; and bring her a "new" pile to fold. She would laugh and joke that a woman's work is never done. We realized that my grandmother was in her element, she was making a contribution which satisfied her, and it was beautiful.

Perhaps your loved one had a favorite hobby or pastime such as baking, planting in the garden, volunteering, teaching, or participating in sports. Whatever it was that made your loved one feel useful or connected in this world is what you should try to build on. **Activities can be modified with a plan to incorporate all five senses so that our loved ones can once again feel the pride and self-esteem that comes from contributing to the world and belonging. This improves not only our loved ones quality of life but also the quality of life of their caregivers.**

*CJFS is launching a new program on January 27th 2015 – **CJFS CARES** – that will provide cognitive, social & physical stimulation to people with memory disorders such as Alzheimer's, dementia, Parkinson's, or stroke. CJFS CARES will be offered on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10a-2p inside the Friedman Center for Jewish Life. The program is open to people of all faiths. If you are interested in enrolling a loved one or would like to volunteer your time or talent, please contact **CJFS CARES** Program Director Pam Leonard at pam@cjfsbham.org or 879-3438.*