



# In the Home

People with Alzheimer's disease may develop feelings of uselessness and unproductiveness. So accomplishing even small tasks can bring satisfaction. It feels good to be participating in the running of a household. It is also a good way for them to exercise motor skills.

The household activities in this section include:

- Helping with the laundry
- Polishing the silver
- Sorting buttons
- Washing the car
- Washing fruits and vegetables
- Stamping envelopes
- Shining shoes
- Helping at mealtime
- Making the bed
- Caring for houseplants

## Help with the laundry

Doing laundry may be a chore, but sorting, organizing, and folding freshly washed clothing can be a positive activity for a person with Alzheimer's disease. Matching up similar colors, fabrics, and styles calls on the person with Alzheimer's disease to use visual and motor skills.

### Options for different levels of ability

Try to do laundry at the same time or on the same day each week so it becomes part of a routine. You can ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to help you hang the wet laundry on a clothing line, take the laundry out of the dryer, or organize clothes after they are dry. Have him/her separate all the socks and then match up the pairs. Then ask him/her to roll the socks into balls. You can also ask the person with Alzheimer's disease how to do these tasks. Sometimes a simple question will trigger memories, and teaching something may help the person reconnect to old skills.

Give someone with Alzheimer's disease one small task to concentrate on, such as folding a shirt. It's best to choose a task where the outcome and the person's performance are not important. Whether the person does the task well or not, the involvement and exercise may stimulate him/her to remember things or reconnect to old skills.

**This activity** can help motor skills, sensory perception, focusing ability, and decision-making skills.



## Polish the silver

Polishing the family silver can be a good opportunity to talk about family tradition while exercising motor skills. This activity is easy and satisfying and yields sparkling results.

### Options for different levels of ability

Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to help you polish the silver. You can remove the knives and separate spoons from forks. You can also give him/her one piece of silverware at a time.

- Use a soft cloth with silver polish, or a special polishing cloth, to apply
- After polish has dried to a cloudy finish, buff off the cream and remove tarnish

Rather than polishing the silverware, someone with Alzheimer's disease may prefer sorting the silverware. Make sure that he/she is not working with any sharp knives, and supervise him/her closely. He/she can organize the silver in a chest or storage bag. Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease about family traditions or even which silver pieces they like the best, and why.

**This activity** can help fine motor skills, sensory perception, and focusing ability.

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## Sort buttons

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Sorting, cleaning, and organizing activities can help a person with Alzheimer's disease keep busy. Such activities may also bring back memories of when he/she ran a household.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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You can ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to sort through a collection of buttons by size, shape, or color. You can also ask him/her to sort nuts and bolts from a tool box, yarn, photos, and even children's toys. Whatever objects are chosen, just make sure he/she does not put these items in his/her mouth.

Always ask the person in advance if he/she is interested in helping you. Let them know that his/her help will be very much appreciated. And when the task is completed, thank the person and praise him/her for the help. This will help validate this person's importance to you.

If the person with Alzheimer's disease has trouble sorting objects, encourage him/her to do other activities that require hand-eye coordination. One such activity is tearing paper. You will need a tray, plain strips of paper about 1 inch wide and 8 inches long, and a bowl or basket. Demonstrate tearing a strip of the paper into small pieces—each about 1 inch long. Show the person with Alzheimer's disease how to do this with one strip of paper; then place the remaining pieces inside the bowl or basket and ask the person to copy what you did. Add more paper if he/she goes through the stack you provided and wants to tear more.

**This activity** can help memory, sensory perception, focusing ability, and fine motor skills.



## Wash the car

Reserve this activity for a warm, sunny day. It provides good outdoor physical exercise. Repetitive, soothing tasks like polishing or drying can be satisfying for the person with Alzheimer's disease to do. Plus, they can be good exercises for improving motor skills.

### Options for different levels of ability

Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to help you with washing, polishing, or drying the car. You may want to do any part of the activity that involves spraying water or the potential for spills. Washing the car can be a messy experience, which can upset someone with Alzheimer's disease. As he/she forgets common tasks, a person with Alzheimer's disease may make more of a mess and then worry about the mess he/she has made. So remember to keep the experience fun. Make sure you ask the person with Alzheimer's disease for his/her help, thanking and praising him/her afterward.

Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to keep you company while you wash the car. Ask him/her questions about how to proceed, and try to engage him/her in the activity. Even if the person with Alzheimer's disease can't participate, sitting in the sunlight and getting fresh air may be enjoyable to him/her.

**This activity** can help motor skills, sensory perception, and focusing ability.

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## Wash fruits and vegetables

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Even an activity as simple as washing fruits and vegetables can make a person with Alzheimer's disease feel useful. It also calls on his/her visual skills when you ask him/her to sort through the vegetables you are using for a meal.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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Ask him/her to separate the potatoes from the salad vegetables and to sort the fruit by type. Then place a single kind of vegetable or fruit in a colander, and ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to wash and then dry (if necessary) that type of fruit or vegetable. Have him/her do this for all the fruits and vegetables.

You can do this exercise anytime, even when you're not preparing a meal or snack.

Someone with Alzheimer's disease may be able to help dry the fruits and vegetables. Or, they can enjoy putting the fruit into a bowl and arranging it for display. Ask him/her about their favorite foods while you sort through the different produce.

**This activity** can help memory, listening skills, sensory perception, and fine motor skills.



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## Stamp envelopes

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It may not seem like an elaborate or exciting task, but putting the person with Alzheimer's disease in charge of putting postage stamps on envelopes can give him/her a sense of responsibility and accomplishment. It can also be a way to stimulate motor skills.

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### Options for different levels of ability

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Just save the envelopes you need mailed and, preferably at the same time each day, give the envelopes and postage stamps to the person with Alzheimer's disease. Ask him/her to help you put the postage stamps on the envelopes.

You can do a modified form of this activity with a person with Alzheimer's disease even if you don't have mail to send, or if the person with Alzheimer's disease is confused by putting stamps on envelopes. Just give the person a rubber stamp, an ink pad, and some envelopes or paper. Ask him/her to stamp the envelopes or paper for a project you are doing.

**This activity** can help fine motor skills and focusing ability.

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## Shine shoes

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Simple household chores are a great way to involve someone with Alzheimer's disease in the activities of daily life. And, in the case of shining shoes, it's an activity that can yield satisfying results.

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### Options for different levels of ability

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First, ask the person with Alzheimer's disease if he/she would help you shine shoes. Then ask how he/she thinks the shoes should be shined. He/she may remember how to do this activity and will be pleased to recall that skill. Remember these steps:

- Remove the laces and clean shoes with saddle soap before polishing. You may have to do this step
- After shoes have dried, apply polish with a cotton ball or an applicator. Allow 10 minutes for the polish to dry
- With one hand inside the shoe to hold it, use either a soft-bristled brush or another cloth to shine the shoe

Someone with Alzheimer's disease may be able to help wipe clean a pair of shoes with a soft cloth or rag. They could also help apply shoe polish. Ask the person to help you, and closely supervise him/her.

**This activity** can help fine motor skills, sensory perception, and focusing ability.



## Help at mealtime

There are many simple and enjoyable activities associated with preparing a meal. Taking part in these preparations can help the person with Alzheimer's disease feel useful and may stir memories of helping around the kitchen.

### Options for different levels of ability

Beating eggs, decorating cakes and cookies, filling sugar and creamer bowls, and kneading bread dough are just a few of the many tasks people with Alzheimer's disease can do. If he/she has a favorite food or meal, let him/her help make it. Shaping hamburger into patties and spooning cookie dough onto a baking tray are fun activities that can make the person feel like he/she is helping out in the kitchen. Remember to always give step-by-step instructions, and be especially vigilant around sharp knives or a hot stove.

A person with Alzheimer's disease may still be able to wash fruits and vegetables, stir batter, and shred lettuce. If he/she needs a simple activity, kneading bread dough is easy and feels good. You can also ask him/her to sit in the kitchen with you and hand you things as you prepare a meal. Talking about the meal preparation or the meal to come can help the person with Alzheimer's disease feel involved in a useful day-to-day activity.

**This activity** can help memory, listening skills, motor skills, sensory perception, and focusing ability.

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## Make the bed

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The person with Alzheimer's disease may appreciate the comfort of having a daily routine such as making the bed. This simple act provides exercise as well as the satisfaction of having performed a useful task.

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### Options for different levels of ability

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You can help the person with Alzheimer's disease develop a morning routine that involves making the bed. He/she will most likely get a feeling of familiarity and comfort from repeating the same activity at the same time each day.

Changing the sheets can provide an even better challenge for his/her motor skills, so make sure the person with Alzheimer's disease is involved in that routine as well.

If making the bed alone is very demanding for the person with Alzheimer's disease, you can involve him/her in helping you make the bed or change the sheets. Let him/her hold the sheets and hand them to you as you make the bed.

**This activity** can help memory, listening skills, fine motor skills, and focusing ability.



## Care for houseplants

Taking care of plants is pleasurable for many people. For those with Alzheimer's disease, caring for plants can offer relaxation and a feeling of being productive.

### Options for different levels of ability

With your help, the person with Alzheimer's disease can do many tasks related to plant care, including adding fertilizer or soil to plant boxes, growing herbs in small pots, and watering or misting plants.

It might be fun to plant bulbs in pots for indoor blooms. Planting flowers in window boxes is another enjoyable activity. Go to your local nursery or flower shop and let the person with Alzheimer's disease choose the plant or flower he/she would like to take care of. The important thing is to make him/her feel useful and happy.

Many people with Alzheimer's disease can help mist plants. Looking at colorful seed packets may also bring some pleasure. You can also ask the person to sit with you as you repot or trim plants.

**This activity** can help memory, fine motor skills, sensory perception, focusing ability, and decision-making skills.