



# Music

Some people with Alzheimer's disease unintentionally deprive themselves of the music that once filled their lives. They may have forgotten how to turn on the radio or the stereo, or forgotten their favorite songs. An avid dancer may no longer recall dance steps. So bringing music back into the life of a person with Alzheimer's disease may be more beneficial and joyful than one might think. It can stimulate memory and help enhance verbal and visual skills. Music may also contribute to a process called *resynchronization*. The idea is that musical rhythm stimulates timing processes in the brain, which may improve the timing of motor actions, such as walking or swinging arms.

The music-related activities in this section include:

- **Singing songs**
- **Going to a concert**
- **Playing a musical instrument**
- **Dancing to lively music**
- **Watching musicals on video**
- **Listening to popular music from his/her past**

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## Sing songs

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Music brings joy into people's lives. Find out the favorite songs of the person with Alzheimer's disease, and then get the lyrics for these songs. You can look online or in a music store. If he/she can't remember particular song titles, think about tunes the person may enjoy, including music that may have been popular during his/her youth.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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Give a copy of the lyrics to the person with Alzheimer's disease, and encourage him/her to sing along when you sing or play the music.

It may be helpful if every song is on its own sheet and you give one out at a time. Collect each sheet after the song is played so the person with Alzheimer's disease won't be confused. Encourage the person to move to the music.

If the person with Alzheimer's disease has difficulty singing or reading from a song sheet, then just play music for him/her. You can sing alone and encourage him/her to join in even if the person doesn't know the words. Try out a few radio stations and see which ones the person with Alzheimer's disease likes best.

**This activity** can help focusing ability and memory.



## Go to a concert

Going to a concert or musical is a wonderful way for someone with Alzheimer's disease to enjoy music, rhythm, and the excitement of a live performance.

### Options for different levels of ability

Look for concerts or musicals performed by local orchestras or community theatre groups. During the holiday season it's often easy to find live musical events. And even children's school performances can be a treat for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

If you and the person with Alzheimer's disease attend a concert or musical, try to find a CD or tape of the music afterward, so the two of you can listen to it together at another time. The songs may remind the person of the fun he/she had and extend the benefits of the activity.

If the person with Alzheimer's disease finds it too difficult to attend a live performance, the two of you can watch concerts on television or listen to them on the radio. Public television stations frequently broadcast concerts, musicals, and ballets, so check your local listings.

And during the holiday season, you can call your local church or high school to see if they have a caroling group. You might ask if a caroling group could visit your home; you and the person with Alzheimer's disease could enjoy the singing and serve the group hot chocolate afterward.

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

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## Play a musical instrument

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The ability to play a musical instrument may remain with a person with Alzheimer's disease, even when other skills slip away. Playing a musical instrument can be an enriching experience for the person with Alzheimer's disease and can help maintain fine motor skills. It reinforces the message that the person with Alzheimer's disease is still capable of doing something creative.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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If the person once played an instrument, ask if he/she would want to play again. If an instrument is not available, you may be able to rent one from a local music store. Ask him/her to play a simple song, or whatever comes to mind.

If possible, provide musical accompaniment, either by singing along or by playing another instrument. Playing duets can be twice as much fun as playing music alone.

If the person can no longer play the instrument, you can play musical recordings for him/her. It may be helpful to find music that reflects his/her interests and musical preferences. For example, if he/she once played the guitar, play a CD or tape that features a guitar. You can also sing or move in time to the music. Enjoying music together can help you connect to the person with Alzheimer's disease and help him/her focus.

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



## Dance to lively music

Dancing not only helps strengthen muscles and preserve balance, but, like other forms of musical activity, it can aid in the timing of motor actions, such as walking or swinging arms. So playing lively music—especially tunes that date back to when the person with Alzheimer’s disease was young—and encouraging the person to dance may offer more benefits than you would imagine.

### Options for different levels of ability

You might want to ask the person with Alzheimer’s disease what his/her favorite bands and singers are. Find a recording of the music, and draw him/her into it with questions such as, “Do you recall the name of this song?” or “Is that a trombone or a trumpet? I can’t tell.” He/she may remember more than you might expect.

You may have to lead the dancing and encourage him/her to join you. If the sound of a big band stirs the person to request a dance, dance along and get into the fun!

If the person with Alzheimer’s disease has reduced mobility, try giving him/her a silk scarf before turning on the music. You might demonstrate waving the scarf in broad motions, encouraging him/her to move it in time with the music. The colorful spectacle and the alluring music can be very stimulating. You can also purchase a children’s set of musical instruments, such as a tambourine or shaker, so that the person with Alzheimer’s disease can move his/her hands and make sounds to accompany the rhythm of the music.

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

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## Watch musicals on video

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Watching musicals on video is a great way to bring the theatre home, especially if it is becoming more difficult for the person with Alzheimer's disease to go on extended outings. Musicals such as *The Sound of Music* or *The Music Man* can provide entertainment for several hours.

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## Options for different levels of ability

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If you know the words to the music, sing along and see if he/she will sing with you. You can also encourage him/her to dance as the actors dance onscreen. During the movie, you might occasionally ask simple questions about the plot or make comments about certain characters as you watch. Try questions like, "Do you think he is a good dancer?" You might even ask, "What do you think will happen next?"

Because some people with Alzheimer's disease find it hard to concentrate for long periods of time, it may be helpful to watch a movie musical in segments. This is a good idea if you are experiencing particularly inclement weather or if the person hasn't been feeling well. Each segment of the musical video can help break up the monotony of his/her day and help stimulate memory and senses.

**This activity** can help focusing ability.



## Listen to popular music from his/her past

Popular music from one's past is often associated with happy events and may help spur important memories. Music from previous eras is easily accessible today because many radio stations specialize in a specific era or genre.

The following lists of popular songs may be helpful in deciding which music might appeal most to people of different ages.

### 65-year-old person

Popular songs when this person was in his/her 20's

- "All For the Love of a Girl"  
— Johnny Horton
- "Among My Souvenirs"  
— Connie Francis
- "Apron Strings"—Cliff Richard
- "The Battle of New Orleans"  
— Johnny Horton
- "Mack the Knife"—Bobby Darin

### 75-year-old person

Popular songs when this person was in his/her 20's

- "'A' You're Adorable"—Perry Como
- "Again"—Gordon Jenkins  
(Joe Graydon, vocal)
- "At the End of the Road"  
— Frankie Laine
- "Baby, I Need You"—Frankie Laine
- "Baby, It's Cold Outside"  
— Dinah Shore and Buddy Clark

### 85-year-old person

Popular songs when this person was in his/her 20's

- "And the Angels Sing"  
— Martha Tilton With Benny Goodman  
and His Orchestra
- "Beer Barrel Polka"  
— The Andrews Sisters
- "Deep Purple"—Larry Clinton
- "Jeepers Creepers"—Al Donohue
- "Moon Love"—Glenn Miller

### 95-year-old person

Popular music when this person was in his/her 20's

- "Am I Blue?"—Ethel Waters
- "Button Up Your Overcoat"  
— Helen Kane
- "Heigh-Ho, Everybody, Heigh-Ho"  
— Rudy Vallee
- "I Want to Be Bad"  
— Annette Hanshaw
- "I'll Get By"—Aileen Stanley

**This activity** can help listening skills.