



Reminiscing

Thinking and talking about the past can be comforting and enjoyable for a person with Alzheimer's disease. Celebrating special occasions is also a good way for people to share special moments. For the person with Alzheimer's disease, celebrating holidays can help trigger memories of past experiences and is a wonderful way of creating new memories.

Activities in this section include:

- Celebrating a birthday
- Taking pictures of each other
- Celebrating a holiday
- Putting photos in an album
- Simulating the person's former occupation
- Remembering fashions
- Talking about childhood
- Watching old movies or television shows

Reminiscing

Celebrate a birthday

Birthday parties can be exciting both for the person having the birthday and for those celebrating with him/her. When birthday celebrations bring people together, the person with Alzheimer's disease can enjoy being part of a family or a group. So make a big deal of his/her birthday and use the opportunity to reminisce with him/her about past birthdays.

Options for different levels of ability

You can enlist help from the person with Alzheimer's disease in preparing for the party. He/she can help plan the party, help with baking a cake, and help put candles on the cake. When the party starts, the person can greet guests, pass out paper plates, and join in singing "Happy Birthday."

Consider celebrating the birthdays of family friends and pets, or even half-birthdays. A small birthday party for the family dog may delight the person with Alzheimer's disease.

If the person with Alzheimer's disease can't join in preparing a party, he/she can still be involved. He/she can help pick out decorations and join in the celebration. Ask the person about birthdays he/she remembers and what was done to commemorate the day. Not only are birthdays a celebration of life, they can also be a nonthreatening way to mark the passage of time.

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



Take pictures of each other

Taking digital photos or instant photos, such as Polaroids, is a great way to involve someone in an activity—and capture the moment as it happens. Photos also reinforce visual skills.

Options for different levels of ability

Bring out some funny hats and scarves and play dress-up with the person with Alzheimer's disease. Have a photo shoot. Take turns photographing each other; then enjoy your photos together.

You can also use a 35mm camera and have the film developed. When you share the photos with the person, ask, "Remember the day we played dress-up?" No matter what type of camera you use, choose one that is lightweight and easy to operate.

Try taking photos outdoors, as well. It gives you an opportunity to get out of the house, get some physical exercise, and see nature or other people.

Although some people with Alzheimer's disease may not be able to take photos, they can enjoy the ones you take. Ask the person to help you choose things to photograph, and discuss the photos after they are developed. Taking photos also provides a great opportunity for you and the person with Alzheimer's disease to spend time together in places you both enjoy.

Polaroid is a registered trademark of Polaroid Corporation.

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

Reminiscing

Celebrate a holiday

Holidays can bring joy and meaning into the life of someone with Alzheimer's disease. They may evoke memories of holidays long ago and prompt reminiscing and even some reflection. They can also stimulate a wide variety of senses when you incorporate traditional holiday music, food, and decorations to bring out the flavor of the holiday. Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease for help when preparing for the special day.

Options for different levels of ability

You can go beyond celebrating the major holidays and find ways to enjoy some special days you may not have acknowledged before: Arbor Day, Columbus Day, Flag Day, or May Day. Plant a tree (or water a tree), read about Columbus, display flags, or make May Day baskets. All these activities let the person with Alzheimer's disease get involved in enjoyable preparation and celebration. You never know—perhaps he/she enjoys caring for trees or used to dance around a maypole as a child. The least celebrated holidays might become household favorites!

If the person with Alzheimer's disease can't participate in preparing for holidays, he/she can still be involved. This could mean helping to answer the door and distribute candy to children on Halloween (but be sensitive to his/her reactions to potentially scary sights), welcoming guests at Thanksgiving, blowing party horns or noisemakers on New Year's Eve, or simply receiving a homemade Valentine's Day card.

This activity can help memory and focusing ability.



Put photos in an album

Sorting through photographs and placing them in a photo album can be enjoyable for someone with Alzheimer's disease. If he/she is sorting photos of earlier times in his/her life, the photos may trigger memories and reminiscing. If not, organizing photos is still a pleasurable activity that stimulates visual and motor skills.

Options for different levels of ability

Bring out a pile of photos—or magazine and newspaper pictures—and ask the person with Alzheimer's disease to help you organize them. You can ask the person to organize the photos according to who is in them, the season in which they were taken, or whether they show people or scenery. Give the person photos you aren't attached to.

Don't be surprised if he/she organizes the photos in a way you don't understand. Remember: the point is not to create a chronologically correct scrapbook, but to allow the person to interact with the photos. Every once in a while, pull out the photo album or scrapbook, talk to him/her about the contents, and recall making the album.

You can do this activity with someone in any stage of Alzheimer's disease as long as you supervise the person carefully. If he/she doesn't recognize anyone in the photos, you can talk about the people or places represented. Even if you don't know all the people in the pictures, you can comment on something in the photograph that might engage the person with Alzheimer's disease. Remember: looking through old photos does not have to be a test of memory; it can simply be an occasion to share.

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

Reminiscing

Simulate the person's former occupation

A person's work identity, whether he/she was an executive, homemaker, bus driver, doctor, or police officer, is integral to that person's whole identity. One of the most upsetting tolls of Alzheimer's disease is the loss of a work identity, even if the person has long since retired. However, skills formed over decades can still be recalled in small ways.

Options for different levels of ability

Create a designated "office space" for the person with Alzheimer's disease. This can be as simple as setting a calculator and notebook on a specific desk on certain days. If the person is a former beautician, you could set up a workstation with combs, brushes, and curlers. At specific times, bring out projects for the person to do: filling out a ledger, curling a wig or a family member's hair (small children might be your best candidates), or putting together a report.

Make sure you supervise work activities closely. When the person loses interest, remove the work materials and put them away. They can be distracting if left out.

Fill a box with equipment and mementos of the person's former occupation. You might want to pull out that old adding machine or typewriter, which are obsolete now but may bring satisfaction. Bring out each item and encourage the person to reminisce about the item and his/her working life.

This activity helps focusing ability, memory, and fine motor skills.



Remember fashions

Remembering fashions can transport us back in time. Fashions may remind us of what we were doing in the past or reflect what was happening in the world. The pictures of women's, men's, and children's clothing found in old books or vintage retail store catalogs echo different lifestyles that may remind the person with Alzheimer's disease about his/her past.

Options for different levels of ability

Here are some suggestions on how to stimulate a conversation based on the fashions of previous eras:

- Ask the person if he/she has ever worn an outfit similar to one in the photos
- Talk about a favorite piece of clothing you've owned in the past
- Point out the low prices in the catalog
- Have the person with Alzheimer's disease pick out an outfit he/she would like to wear today

To order books featuring fashion catalogs from the '30s through the '60s:

- Log on to www.doverpublications.com
- Or write to: Dover Publications
31 East 2nd Street
Mineola, NY 11501

A fun twist on this activity is to look at current fashion in men's or women's fashion magazines today. Examine what they are wearing and compare today's fashions with those of the past.

Use old photographs to reminisce about the clothing people used to wear. Show the person vintage retail store catalogs and use the pictures to spark memories and discussion about popular fashions from that era.

This activity can help focusing ability and memory skills.

Reminiscing

Talk about childhood

People with Alzheimer's disease sometimes live in the past. Reminiscing about childhood can be a pleasant way for them to experience old memories, use verbal skills, and connect to others socially. Talking about events and people they remember might even stimulate them to remember more about their lives.

Options for different levels of ability

To encourage a person with Alzheimer's disease to reminisce:

- Ask the person to talk about his/her schooling and teachers
- Ask the person about his/her family (brothers, sisters, or cousins)
- Talk about a favorite memory from your childhood
- Tell him/her about something a young child did that made you laugh

Be prepared for questions about where these people are now. Keep in mind that a person with Alzheimer's disease may not realize someone is deceased. There is no need to stimulate a grieving process.

You can also look at pictures from parenting magazines. Pictures of children lift most people's spirits. This can also be a way to spur a conversation about childhood memories.

Use old photographs to reminisce about the person's younger days. Pictures of his/her children, nephews, and nieces can also be a good way to initiate a conversation. If the person is not particularly talkative, you can tell him/her about what you liked to do when you were a child.

This activity can help memory.



Watch old movies or television shows

Watching old movies or television shows can be a fun, relaxing way for a person with Alzheimer's disease to connect to old memories, encounter familiar stories, and get visual stimulation. It can also provide a topic of conversation for you and the person with Alzheimer's disease.

Options for different levels of ability

You can find classic movies and vintage television shows in many places. Tune in to public television channels or cable stations such as TV Land, American Movie Classics, and Turner Classic Movies. Head to your local library or video store, or take out a Netflix subscription (www.netflix.com) to have the movies of your choice delivered to your door.

Choose movies on subjects that may be connected to the person's past, such as a specific time in history he/she associates with. While the movie is running you can talk about the actors, the plot, or even the film's locations. Ask the person with Alzheimer's disease about his/her experiences going to the movies as a child or listening to favorite shows on the radio.

Watching a classic movie or vintage television show can help make the current environment familiar to the person with Alzheimer's disease. If the person associates a show with a happy time in his/her life, it can be very comforting. You can even make some popcorn to stimulate his/her senses and add to the feeling of familiarity and comfort.

This activity can help memory.