

HIGHGATE SENIOR LIVING



Physical Activity Planner for Memory Loss

Regular physical activity can bring significant health benefits to people of all ages, and the need for physical activity does not decrease the older you get. In fact, there is evidence that as little as [15 minutes a day](#)¹ of physical activity can extend years of active independent living, reduce disability, and improve the quality of life for older adults.

Regular [physical activity reduces the risk of or can improve many diseases](#)² and conditions including arterial hypertension, diabetes mellitus type 2, dyslipidemia, obesity, coronary heart disease, chronic heart failure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

For individuals with memory loss, it becomes increasingly difficult to stay active. This Physical Activity Planner is intended to help you create a daily plan filled with enjoyable activities that provide meaning and purpose for you and your loved one while improving their overall health and well-being.

What Happens When There's No Activity

When your loved one starts to struggle with memory loss, it's normal to want to help them with things, such as buttoning their shirt, or to do things for them, like their laundry. However, this can often lead to your loved one becoming fully dependent on you too soon.

Without activities to keep your loved one stimulated and engaged, you might find that your loved one [wanders](#)³, starts to withdraw from the outside world, displays signs of agitation or boredom, or has a hard time falling asleep at night (known as [sundowning](#)⁴).

1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395188/>

2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395188/>

3 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/signs-its-time-to-consider-memory-care-for-your-loved-one-with-dementia>

4 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/understanding-sundowners-syndrome-dementia-after-sunset->

Being allowed to carry on with everyday activities for as long as possible and keeping your loved one's mind and body active while they cope with memory loss gives them the opportunity to improve their cognitive skills and potentially slow down their decline. It also helps make them feel valued and successful in completing a task or activity.

But don't feel like you have to fill every minute of the day! Quiet times are important, too.

Why Activity Is So Important

There is strong evidence from epidemiological studies that exercise or physical activity can delay onset and progression of dementia in older adults.

[Staying active is essential to living well.](#)⁵ Incorporating regular physical activity for your loved one can help prevent frustration, boredom, and unexpected behaviors. It also has been shown to improve memory recall for some older adults with memory loss.

Most often what prevents families from implementing an activity program at home is lack of guidance about what exercises are appropriate for their loved one or fear that physical activity will result in an injury or cause pain.

As a caregiver, it is important to focus on what your loved one can do, even when the memory loss is more advanced.

How to Increase Physical Activity

If your mom spends a majority of her days in her favorite chair or your dad has difficulty getting out of bed in the morning, introducing 15 minutes of physical activity and slightly increasing this over time has many benefits. It can decrease joint pain and muscle aches, improve mobility, improve mood, increase appetite, and offer a variety of other positive benefits. Here are a few tips to get started:

⁵ <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/activities-to-help-with-dementia-stay-active-and-engaged>

1. Use simple, easy-to-follow directions.
2. Create a repetitive sequence.
3. Create visual cards of the activity to prompt your loved one.
4. Avoid long sessions of physical activity. Instead, break up the day with two or three 15-minute sessions of activity.

Physical activity doesn't have to be regimented exercise. It can include stretching, dancing, walking, or any other variety of activities your loved one might enjoy.

Using the Physical Activity Planner

Humans are creatures of habit. Creating a daily routine can be helpful for both you and your loved one. This Physical Activity Planner (see the "Physical Activity Planner" on Page [12](#)) will help you spend less time trying to figure out what to do and more time on activities that will improve your loved one's overall well-being.

When coming up with a regular routine for your loved one, the goal should be to tailor it as much to their preferences, past activities, and life story as possible. This planner will guide you through:

- Types of activities for people with memory loss
- Things to consider before making your daily activity plan
- A checklist of daily activities to consider
- Tips for creating a daily activity plan
- A sample daily plan
- A Physical Activity Planner you can print and fill out
- Tips for evaluating your Physical Activity Planner

Keep in mind that as the memory loss progresses over time, your daily activity plan will need to be flexible. But with some creativity and patience, you can create a variety of activities to keep your loved one moving.

Types of Physical Activity

- ❑ **Aerobic exercise:** Improves general physical health and increases blood flow to the brain. Aerobic exercise includes walking or dancing.
- ❑ **Resistance or weight training:** Exercises the muscles and improves bone density, strength, metabolic rate, and postural support. Activities include squeezing rubber balls, using elastic resistance bands, or incorporating light weights.
- ❑ **Flexibility and balance exercises:** Strengthen the spine and supporting muscles and improve coordination and balance. Exercises like bending, stretching, and yoga all help with flexibility and balance.

Creative Ways to Incorporate Physical Activity

There are many [types of activities](#)⁶ to help your loved one with [memory loss stay active and engaged](#).⁷ Here are some additional ways to incorporate physical activity into your loved one's day.

- ❑ **Daily routines:** Some of the best ways to help your loved one remain active are to keep them involved in the [daily routines around the home](#),⁸ such as getting dressed or helping with bathing. Although it may be tempting to help your loved one as much as possible, having them help with what they can keeps them moving. Other ways to incorporate activity into your loved one's day may include having them help to make a sandwich, sweeping, or folding clothes.

6 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/5-stimulating-activities-for-your-loved-one-with-dementia>

7 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/six-ways-to-keep-seniors-with-alzheimers-active-and-engaged>

8 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/slideshow-what-are-activities-of-daily-living-anyway>

Things to Consider Before Making a Plan

It's important to create meaningful activities, not just ones that fill time. Stick with activities your loved one has always enjoyed but know that some activities may need to be modified.

Before making a plan, consider asking your loved one these questions or think about what their answers might be:

- ☐ What types of activities would your loved one enjoy?
- ☐ What types of activities would your loved one benefit from the most?
- ☐ What hobbies or pastimes can you incorporate into physical activity with your loved one?
- ☐ What resources can you use to find activities your loved one might like?
- ☐ Are there any classes your loved one might enjoy going to?
- ☐ Does your loved one enjoy being creative? If so, how?

Notes:

Possible Daily Activities to Consider

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|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dusting | <input type="checkbox"/> Eating | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking outside |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Polishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Drying and putting away dishes | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Bathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Practicing yoga |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tidying stacks of magazines | <input type="checkbox"/> Shaving | <input type="checkbox"/> Practicing tai chi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making the bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing | <input type="checkbox"/> Stretching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Washing laundry | <input type="checkbox"/> Giving a hand massage | <input type="checkbox"/> Tossing a ball |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Folding clothes or napkins | <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to a museum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing food | <input type="checkbox"/> Fixing something | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking a dance class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking inside | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baking | <input type="checkbox"/> Bowling at home | |

Notes:

Creating a Physical Activity Planner

When writing a daily physical activity plan for your loved one with memory loss, it is important to focus on their likes, dislikes, strengths, abilities, and interests; choose the right activities; consider your approach; and modify the environment if needed.

1. Focus on Your Loved One

- ❑ Be aware of physical difficulties, such as tiring quickly, impaired vision, or limited hearing, and modify activities to your loved one's abilities.
- ❑ Take note when they seem happy, anxious, distracted, or irritable. If your loved one isn't enjoying the current activity, it may be time to introduce another activity or take a break.

2. Choose the Right Activities

- ❑ Plan activities that can be part of a regular routine. It will help you structure the day.
- ❑ Concentrate on the process, not the result. What matters is movement and activity.
- ❑ Choose activities that build on current skills.
- ❑ Consider activities that stimulate all five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.
- ❑ Plan tasks and activities that you can do together and that you enjoy, too.
- ❑ Relate activity to work life. A former office worker might enjoy activities that involve organizing. A former farmer may like working in the yard. A former stay-at-home mom might enjoy folding laundry.
- ❑ Be flexible and change activities as needed.

- ❑ Plan quieter activities for when your loved one is tired, anxious, or likely to become disturbed by loud noises or busy places.
- ❑ Structured and pleasant activities often reduce agitation and improve mood.
- ❑ Keep in mind that the success of an activity can vary from day to day.
- ❑ Consider what times of day your loved one functions best and make modifications to your daily routine as needed.
- ❑ Adjust activities as the disease progresses. A multisensory approach to activity is even more important in the advanced stages of memory loss.

3. Consider Your Approach

- ❑ Offer support and supervision. You may have to help with all the different stages of the process.
- ❑ Break activities into simple, easy-to-follow steps. Too many directions at once can be overwhelming.
- ❑ Let your loved one know they are needed. Ask, “Will you please help me?”
- ❑ People with memory loss often have problems concentrating. Plan for this by having a variety of activities they can do, such as folding napkins, dusting, or setting the table.
- ❑ Activities are likely to take a bit longer to do than before, so try to be patient and allow more time than you would normally.
- ❑ Try not to be critical of how your loved one does things.
- ❑ Provide encouragement and support.

4. Modify the Environment

- ☐ Minimize distractions to help prevent uneasiness.
- ☐ Consider using aromatherapy, soft music, or soft lighting to set the mood.

Notes:

Physical Activity Planner

Use the Physical Activity Planner to brainstorm activities you can do with your loved one to keep them moving. Here are a few examples to get you started.

| Day of the Week | Activity | Amount of Time | Notes |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|---|
| M, T, W, Th, F | Squeeze stress ball | 10 minutes | During <i>Wheel of Fortune</i> |
| T, Th | Chair stretching | 15 minutes | YouTube video Chair Exercise for Older Adults⁹ |
| M, W, F | Sit and stand exercise | 5 minutes | While dressing in the morning |
| T, Th | Ball toss | 10 minutes | Before bed |

Create Your Own Physical Activity Planner

You know your loved one best. Start with picking one activity per day for five to 10 minutes a day. Gradually increase to three to five times per week, with 15-minute planned physical activities two to three times a day.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BcPHWGQO44>

Week 1

| Day of the Week | Activity | Amount of Time | Notes |
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Week 2

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Week 3

| Day of the Week | Activity | Amount of Time | Notes |
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Week 4

| Day of the Week | Activity | Amount of Time | Notes |
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Daily Activity Journal

Use the Daily Activity Journal to keep track of physical activity and your loved one's response to various activities you plan throughout the day.

| Date | Activity | Time Spent | Less or More than Planned? | Response to Activity | Notes |
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| Date | Activity | Time Spent | Less or More than Planned? | Response to Activity | Notes |
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Evaluating Your Daily Activity Plan

No two people are alike. Every individual has different levels of cognitive function, different interests, and different health considerations.

When evaluating your Physical Activity Planner or reviewing the Daily Activity Journal, consider:

- Which activities worked best and why, and which ones didn't work?
- Were there times with too much going on or too little to do?
- Did you have aerobic, balance, and strength activities throughout the week?
- Did your loved one seem bored, irritable, or restless during any specific time of the day? Is this an opportunity to incorporate an activity?
- Was there ample time between activities to rest?

Use what you learn to adjust your Physical Activity Planner, but keep in mind that the success of an activity may vary from day to day. Planning activities for a person with memory loss works best when you continually explore, experiment, and adjust.

Notes:



This guide is brought to you by Highgate Senior Living, an industry-leading assisted living and memory care provider offering a holistic approach to care. Pioneering change in the senior living industry, Highgate is committed to creating a unique and desirable living option where each resident can live a life of purpose.

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