

Coronavirus Emergency

10 useful tips to face the home-quarantine period with our relatives with dementia

1 - PHOTOGRAPHS

This can be the time to pick up old photos, put them in order, ask for the story behind and let a free narration flow out, and maybe put some in a box, a handbag, a drawer, a bag or in any other container that is known, desired, loved and meaningful for the person with dementia.

This activity could become more complex by adding other objects to the container (a bracelet, earrings, a necklace, a wallet or a purse, a handkerchief, the crown to recite the rosary). Keep it handy and set up a schedule to open it, to recall and enrich.

These objects help recover memories of personal facts and life experiences; photos could also make up a personal album, useful to stimulate individual memory and keep pieces of information regarding family members.

2 - OLD NEWSPAPER CUTS

You can place in a box old newspaper clippings, objects and souvenirs which serve as ornaments for the home but which may no longer draw attention. If they are kept in the heart of the persons with dementia they will be able to recall something to them. This activity helps the person to recollect the name of objects and the facts related to them (the spouse, the caregiver or the child can name the object and encourage answers calmly, with irony and with understanding)

3 - OLD SONGS

It's time to listen to old songs (dating back to the past of the person with dementia). Music on CDs or audiotapes can be useful not only for listening but also for dancing (waltz, ballroom dancing etc) or to rhythm the musical harmony by clapping, or with arm and body movements. This pastime also involves the family member who starts the activity.

4 - MOVEMENT

In this situation movement is sacrificed. However, we remind you that it is essential that the persons with dementia maintain their mobility as much as possible: for example, you can make them walk along the corridor, the terrace or in the larger spaces of the apartment. Green light also for simple exercises such as getting up and sitting onto the chair, alternately lifting the knees from the sitting position (5 times), raising one leg at a time (5 times), raising the tip of the feet (5 times), raising the arms up (rest 3 times then repeat) and finally bring the arms out (rest 3 times and repeat). Some of the exercises listed can be found at <http://www.alzheimer.it/diecies.pdf>

5 - MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

You can give vent to your imagination and creativity by opening cupboards in the pantry where there are pasta and rice, legumes and cereals that can be used as a material for a selective attention activity that involves separating, dividing by pretending that they are mixed. Alternatively use thread spools to be divided by colors. A creative activity can be creating necklaces or bracelets using pasta such as ditalini. These can also be colored with food colors sold in supermarkets.

You can mend an old wool sock with the thicker and easier to handle wool needle or use a piece of very coarse fabric and have it sewn. These activities can be very relaxing: we don't expect perfect results and it doesn't matter whether the stitch is long or the fabric curled.

You can also think of other home activities such as cleaning, carefully analyzing what the person used to do before the diagnosis. You can arrange on a table objects used in the past working life, such as a typewriter, pens, sheets (if used), notebooks (get them from grandchildren) with the tasks to be corrected (for a teacher); or retrieve construction toys such as the meccano, Lego or some other tools such as large screw nuts and place them in a box that the person can take whenever he/she wishes.

Drawers can be arranged, linen tidied, towels folded: it is advisable to close doors and drawers containing clothing that we do not want to be touched. Organized spaces must be provided with unused clothing to be pulled out to get air and then put them in order in the shelves or drawers. The official excuse, which fits perfectly, is spring cleaning and for this purpose, provide the person with a damp cloth to clean the inside of the cabinets and drawers.

Another activity may be to have handkerchiefs, wipes or other laundry washed with wool soap or Marseille soap, in order to carry out household activities. Or iron handkerchiefs or linen with the iron heated to 35 °, fold the laundry (towels, , napkins, socks etc.) and put them in the drawers.

It is essential that everything suggested is done together with the family-caregiver since the imitative gesture calms and makes it pleasant to do chores together.

6 – SCHEDULING

Routine is fundamental for people with dementia; therefore we ask you to make the effort to plan in the morning and then follow a more or less constant schedule during the day whenever possible. Maintain meal, sleep and wakefulness times helps reducing the sunset syndrome, which we know is a condition characterized by a set of specific symptoms (mainly confusional state, agitation and delirium) that elderly people, especially those with dementia, experience in the late afternoon, in the evening and by night.

Here an example schedule that may be useful.

Morning: breakfast, hygiene, tidying up the house (getting help with making the bed and arranging the linen etc), dusting, washing the dishes, cleaning the surfaces; go out to go to the gate, to the main door, to the courtyard or walk around the house; involve the person in preparing lunch: wash vegetables, chop them and in conclusion make him/her do what he/she can perform as for instance dressing the table (only cutlery and napkins).

Afternoon: ask the person to help with cleaning up the kitchen, washing cutlery and unbreakable dishes (this activity is supposed to last as long as needed by the person), using just a little liquid detergent, with drying the dishes and sweeping the kitchen, allowing constantly for imperfect results. Since afternoon is a long period, take a nap (if necessary), then leave the apartment as in the morning, plan sewing, construction activities etc. or turn on the TV to watch old comic movies or listen to music, sing and/or dance. If the person gets restless, arrange for another "trip" to the gate etc.

Dinner: same as for lunch.

7 - ILLUMINATION

Being forced to stay at home for many hours will also lead to an increase in household expenses but we recommend keeping the light on as much as possible. Since the dim sunlight can trigger the sunset syndrome, it can be helpful to have enough illumination in the house or in the room lit: a lighting system that avoids areas of shade or penumbra can be useful.

A night light in the bedroom can help prevent agitation when waking up. Therefore in a corner of the living room (also lit with a lamp) you can arrange a table or a coffee table, an armchair or a comfy chair with the objects that the person likes to manipulate, and invite him/her to take possession of this space, sit, touch and maybe also rest.

It might be helpful to place a wallet, a doll, some stuffed animal, a blanket, some photos and costume jewelry on a tray or in a basket or in a shoe box. These containers and objects will reassure the person, who can freely access them, and when he/she is in the mood he/she can "play" with them.

8 - SANITARY AND HYGIENIC RULES

Have all people who come into contact with your loved ones respect the hygiene and health standards that are recommended. Hand washing and disinfection of rooms are fundamental, especially if your loved one is followed by a family assistant who does not live with him/her and attends other environments. To make things easier, have a small towel moistened with disinfectants ready to be used by the person with dementia.

9 - SUNSET SYNDROME

Though it is true that there are limitations regarding going out, as we said before, in order to face the sunset syndrome when the person with dementia does not recognize his/her home, it is necessary to indulge and go out **even if only on the landing or in the entrance hall or in the courtyard**. This measure, which is one of the allowed measures, can help the person with dementia and restore orientation. Even making a single flight of stairs can be useful to distract or tire the person (always evaluate the degree of residual motor skill and abilities); however, it is preferable to go up and not descend, placing the patient's hand on the handrail, to then take the lift back to the apartment.

10 - LEISURE AND PLEASURE

Cooking together can represent a valid moment of leisure and pleasure. This activity can be organized as part of the daily schedule. The cooking moment can be structured in stages: **1** - think of a recipe and choose the food to cook; **2** - write down things that are missing and that should be bought; **3** - go to the supermarket (the caregiver, in this case, not the person with dementia); **4** - prepare the food according to the recipe and get help from the person with dementia in the simplest tasks such as cutting onions, celery or carrots etc.

It is advisable to use a knife with a hacksaw or a slightly sharp blade to avoid injury. Food will be cut into pieces that might be a bit strange and imperfect but this must be tolerated because the goal is to keep the procedural memory trained (e.g. how to perform an action) and not the result. Cooking food can be a danger, but paying close attention the person with dementia can stir the food in the pot. Many people in this period suggest recipes for preparing biscuits: rolling out the dough, cutting it with the molds or preparing a mixed salad, a fruit salad or a cold dessert make cooking very satisfying and pleasant and, in addition, increase the self-esteem of the person with dementia (maybe he/she once was a good cook) and his/her perception of being still capable.