



Recreation and community centres are central to our neighbourhoods and can be the primary way people living with dementia and their care partners can remain engaged with their community.

What makes activities engaging and easy for people living with dementia to participate in?

- **Focus on adult interests:** Treat people living with dementia with respect and autonomy. Activities should be engaging for adults and respectful of their interests.
- **Be inclusive:** Ensure that activities are welcoming to all, paying attention to the diverse needs of participants.
- **Encourage participation:** Offer positive reinforcement and high levels of encouragement to motivate participants.
- **Offer a variety of enjoyable activities and match activities to abilities:** People living with dementia have a variety of interests and abilities, so be sure to offer a range of activities with various levels. This includes having a mix of non-competitive and slower paced activities (e.g. lawn bowling), along with faster-paced and competitive activities (e.g. basketball).
- **Adjust the environment:** Be mindful of auditory and visual stimulation. For

example, ask participants whether they prefer a quiet environment or background music.

- **Enable personal limits:** Let participants recognize and set their own limits and offer regular breaks. For example, in a yoga class, allow the use of chairs or offer modified movements.

Be Mindful of physical ability:

Younger people living with dementia (in their 40s, 50s, or 60s) may prefer more physically challenging activities. Be sure to cater to their needs as well.

Consider the following when planning or scheduling programs:

- **Time of day:** Some people living with dementia may experience increased confusion later in the day. In these cases, late afternoon or early evening activities may be challenging. Consider morning or midday activities for better engagement

- **Offer flexible registration options:** Allow participants to register in person, by phone or online. Provide hard copies of registration forms in advance and allow flexibility to submit forms in advance of sessions.
- **Routine and predictability:** A set schedule can make it easier for a person living with dementia to plan, participate and feel comfortable attending.
- **Flexible attendance:** Allow participants to drop in without the pressure of mandatory weekly attendance, as some days may be “bad days.”
- **Keep it short:** Keep activities short - no more than 30 to 45 minutes - for optimal engagement.
- **Small groups:** A smaller class size (under 20 participants) is ideal for fostering a supportive environment.
- **Accessible spaces:** Consider running programs in rooms/spaces that are accessible, easy to find, with limited distractions.

Tip: Be creative with having drop-in rates or cancellation policies that allow for flexibility. Also consider having care partners attend for free to support the person living with dementia.

Tips to increase participation rates:

- **Send out invitations:** Invitations can make attendees feel valued, welcome and comfortable.
- **Distribute “reminder cards”:** Reminder cards that people can take home should include the date and time of upcoming activities or programs.

Tip: Visit alzheimer.ca/dfc/resources for more tips on creating dementia-friendly written materials (i.e., including registration forms and newsletters) and tips on dementia-friendly phone calls.

Tips to adapt and lead activities that are inclusive and dementia friendly:

- Focus on participation and enjoyment during activities, not perfect execution.
- **Participants may need breaks:** Provide flexibility and a safe environment for people living with dementia to move around freely as needed.
- **Encourage observation before participation:** Asking a person living with dementia to start or lead an activity may be difficult.



Tip: It's easier for someone to watch the activity or action first before joining in.

- **Seating:** To enable easy movement, offer aisle seats if you notice someone in your class may show signs of confusion or disorientation.
- **Respect and support:** Treat and respect all participants equally, regardless of abilities, so they can participate without pressure.
- **Time references:** Use context-based cues instead of analog clocks, for example, "We'll move onto the next exercise after this song ends."
- **Program planning:** Consider learning more about your participants' interests, preferences and abilities and to create programs that meet their needs to promote participation, engagement, independence and fun.

Tips to make your centre dementia friendly:

- Friendly and knowledgeable staff who have received dementia training.
- Clear signage and simple layouts.
- Comfortable, adequate light and quiet spaces for personal time or rest.
- Accessible/family washrooms where care partners can assist if needed.

Tip: Programs that have an assistant or volunteer to help participants (while a separate instructor leads a class) can be dementia friendly as well as beginner friendly. The assistant or volunteer could help correct technique or offer other options to people living with dementia.

For more information, or to learn more about dementia and dementia-friendly communities, reach out to your local [Alzheimer Society](#) or visit the [Dementia-Friendly Canada website](#).



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