

The Importance of Meaningful Leisure Activities for Persons with Dementia By: Denise Ansell, Client Support Coordinator

When asked what brings meaning to their lives the following suggestions were identified which reflects what it means to be fully alive and to live life to the fullest.

- An opportunity to express ourselves and to be ourselves
- Finding balance in our lives
- Having fun, laugh and enjoy life
- Contributing to our community
- Having a sense of freedom from the stresses of life
- Connecting with our friends and family
- Opportunities to feel challenged, grow and develop

Leisure allows us to continue to express who we are and what we value about ourselves by using our own skills and abilities that we have gained throughout our life. A person with dementia continues to have skills; the activity may have to be somewhat adapted over time to ensure continued success.

It is important to find the right balance between relaxation and being busy. Too much activity can increase stress but too little could cause boredom; balance structure with free time.

Feelings of pleasure, enjoyment and happiness are an important part of staying positive. Having fun, being mischievous and laughter decreases stress and puts others at ease. Remember... laughter is the best medicine.

All people need to have a sense of purpose, have opportunities to contribute, feel valued and make a difference. Keep open to the potential of volunteering; advocate for yourself and in doing so you advocate for every other person with dementia.

Leisure activities help us to escape the stress of daily responsibilities. Practice meditation, deep breathing, listen to your favorite music or get outside for a walk in your neighborhood to connect with others and to enjoy a change of scenery.

Being social helps us to connect with our friends and family; surround yourself with people who support you and share a common bond. This will assist in keeping you from being isolated and the conversation is very good for your brain.

Continue to seek opportunities to grow and develop by learning new skills. Don't be afraid to try something new and to challenge yourself. Ask a friend or family member to teach you something on the computer or spend time enjoying and exploring the beauty of nature.

What can others do to support those who live with dementia in maintaining their leisure activities?

- Be knowledgeable and think broadly; understand my condition and don't doubt my diagnosis
- Listen to me and ask me; ask what is meaningful to me, listen and observe how various activities make me feel
- Know me; understand my preferences and find out how I would like to be supported
- Believe in me; find out about my abilities and find way to support me
- Enable me; assist me in finding new ways or adaptations
- Partner with me; include me in planning and decision-making