



InfoCARE | Supporting Informal Caregivers of People with Dementia

Module 3

Early-Stage Dementia | Mind Stimulating Activities



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Let's get started...





Module's Overview



The loss of cognitive functions in dementia patients doesn't signify the loss of the need for a good quality of life. Although abilities are being diminished according to the stage of dementia, **keeping patients involved in activities and things that they enjoy is of great importance to the person's quality of life.**

As a caregiver of a person with dementia, it is important that you try to maintain those interests and reinforce relationships to support your loved ones as much as possible.

This module will provide learners, specifically informal caregivers of people with dementia, with examples of **cognitive, sensorial, physical and reminiscence activities which can be used to spend meaningful time with the person that they care for and is at the early-stage of dementia.**





Learning Goals

By the end of this module, you will know:

1

What is meant by early-stage dementia, its characteristics and common symptoms

2

How to improve the quality of caring and the quality of life of people with dementia

3

How to implement cognitive, sensorial, physical and reminiscence activities with people living with early-stage dementia

4

How to spend meaningful time with the person you care for, while performing different kind of mind-stimulating activities

Let's deep-dive into contents...





Early-stage Dementia



Progression of dementia

Dementia can generally be described in stages:

- » **Early:** the progress is slow and symptoms are often overlooked.
- » **Middle:** symptoms become more pronounced and more restrictive.
- » **Advanced:** symptoms are severe and the cognitive impairment is serious and irreversible.

What is early-stage dementia?

Early dementia refers to people who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another type of dementia, and are at the beginning of the disease. It can affect anyone regardless of age and this initial phase can last for years. The diagnosis not only affects the person diagnosed; also to their families, close environment and anyone who cares about them. In fact, it is usually the person's closest environment that notices the first symptoms, forgetfulness and difficulties.

In this phase **the person is able to live independently to a greater or lesser extent, but this will depend entirely on each case and circumstances.** Although it is necessary to consider that, after diagnosis and the first 2 years, continuous follow-up and exploration will be necessary. It is recommended that the person with early dementia goes to a professional service that can supervise the progression (clinic, neuropsychology center or day center, etc.).



Early-stage Dementia

Common Characteristics

Short-term memory starts to deteriorate and the person begins to have some difficulties with:

- » Coming up with the right word or name (punctually).
- » Retain new information.
- » Remembering names when introduced to new people.
- » Performing tasks in social or work settings.
- » Remembering material that was just read.
- » Perform daily routines.

Other common signs are:

- » Losing or misplacing a valuable object.
- » Having mood and personality changes.
- » Experiencing increased trouble with planning or organizing.



Despite this, **in this phase the person is still capable of doing many things, and a lot of work can be done to stimulate and slow down the symptoms.**



Tips for caregivers and families



During the early stage, it's possible for people with dementia to live well by taking control of their health and wellness, and focusing the energy on aspects of their life that are most meaningful to them. As a caregiver, there is much you can do to support them:

» **Be flexible and patient.**

» **Help the person with dementia remain calm and oriented.** Be empathic and do not show stress. Talk about current events to keep them focused on the present and avoid time confusion. Keeping an environment that is familiar for the person and simplify the routines can significantly help as well.

» **Make dressing and tidying up easier for the person with dementia.** Prepare a full set of clothes for the day in advance, so the person does not work too hard to choose what to wear.

» **Help with memory loss.** Maintain frequent conversations to stimulate it. You can also use reminders, post-its, list of daily tasks and routines, etc.

» **Promote stimulating and enjoyable activities** for the person with dementia.

» In addition, this is the ideal time to **put legal, financial and end-of-life plans in place**, because the person with dementia will be able to participate in decision-making.



Early-stage Dementia Activities



The person with dementia will eventually need assistance to plan daily activities, promote an active lifestyle and keep stimulated at cognitive level. There are different types of activities that can be conducted when it comes to stimulation of people with dementia:

- » **Cognitive Stimulation Activities:** to stimulate thinking and memory overall. They help to delay the worsening of symptoms.
- » **Sensorial Activities:** to stimulate senses. They ease the communication for people with dementia, while helping to reduce agitation, sleep disturbances, and unmet needs.
- » **Physical Activities:** to ease body movements. Physical exercise has positive effects on the brain and general health, especially for dementia patients. They also favor the appetite, breathing and heart functioning.
- » **Reminiscence Activities:** to evoke memories and feelings. They may help elderly people with dementia feel valued, satisfied and peaceful by remembering happy times of their past. In dementia, people typically lose short-term memory, but they are often able to recall old memories.



Early-stage Dementia Activities

In the following slides, we present ideas about activities you can do when caring for a loved one with early-stage dementia to keep them busy and active. Since they are the most recommended at this stage, we included mainly cognitive stimulation activities. However, you can choose different activities or adapt those we propose, so that **they are consistent with your loved one's personality, needs and circumstances.**

Although each activity has an estimated duration, **it is advisable to adapt the time to the characteristics of the person and to how well they react.** If you notice that the activity is too challenging, you can simplify it, shorten it or have a break and continue at another time.

During the activities, if the person responds to any exercise in the wrong way, it is important to avoid saying “no” or “it's wrong”, **you should offer alternatives and correction tips** such as “Let's try to remember it correctly, don't we?” or “Don't you think it would be better that way?”





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A1. Jigsaw Puzzles

Type >> Cognitive Stimulation.

Benefits >> It stimulates short-term memory, cognition, visuo-spatial reasoning, delay in cognitive decline, entertainment.

Suggested Time >> 45 minutes.

Tools and conditions >> Jigsaw, table, comfortable seating.

Description >> Turn over all the pieces and study the picture on the box together. Start by as many clues as needed in order to help achieve. You can discuss about different strategies that can be used to solve the jigsaw (eg: starting from the edges) and try to use them each time.

Tips and recommendations >> The person may still be able to complete 100-200 piece jigsaw. If this is not possible, find a jigsaw that is not too complicated but it is still challenging enough. Choose jigsaws themes that promote conversations.





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A2. Reality Orientation in current news and dual task

Type >> Cognitive Stimulation.

Benefits >> Stimulates orientation, language and attention skills, as well as executive function. Promotes discussion.

Suggested Time >> 50 minutes.

Tools and conditions >> Pen and paper, quiet environment.

Description >> Start by asking the person to talk about themselves (eg: name, place of birth, hobbies, etc) and current date time. Then, you can choose a current topic to discuss and request them to perform some hand movements (eg: opening and shutting palms) while giving answers to your questions (eg: what do we do in New Year's eve?). You can also ask them to find a strategy to memorise a characteristic item that is linked to the topic (eg: fireworks), so they can recall it later by writing it down on a paper when asked.

Tips and recommendations >> Choose any topic, depending on the current affairs. If they can't find a way to remember the item, you can provide them with a strategy (eg: the word starts with the letter "F").





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A3. Words Chain

Type >> Cognitive stimulation.

Benefits >> It stimulates verbal fluency and memory, helps retain information.

Suggested Time >> 30 minutes.

Tools and conditions >> Paper sheets and pencil.

Description >> Ask the person to continue a list of chained words. Each added word has to begin with the last letter or syllable of the previous one, example: Chair → Rice → Early ...

Tips and recommendations >> If the person is struggling, you can help by giving some clues. You two can just speak or ask the person to write down the words on a piece of paper, which will result in greater stimulation. The activity can also be presented as a game, in which each person says a word until no more words come to your minds, or the words begin to be repeated.





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A4. Put the steps in order

Type >> Cognitive stimulation.

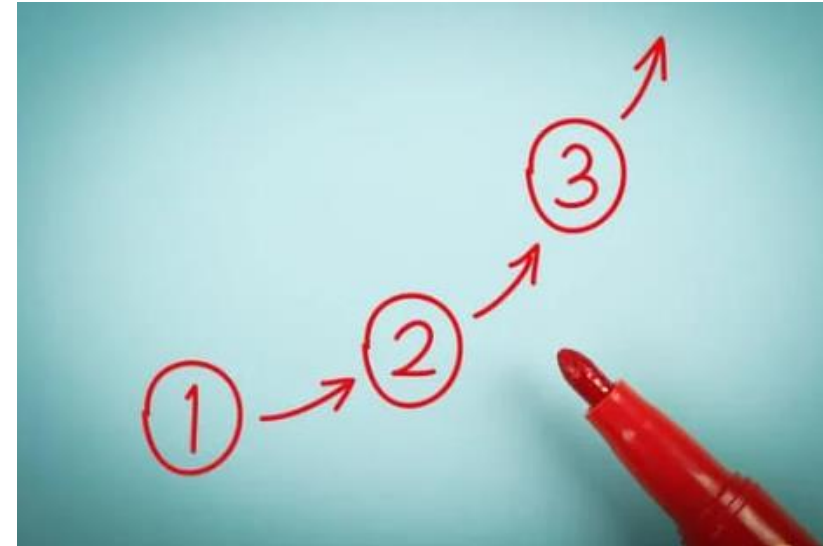
Benefits >> It helps maintain operational memory and remember the logical sequence of daily activities.

Suggested Time >> 30 minutes.

Tools and conditions >> Lists of different steps that must be taken when carrying out a day-to-day process/activity. Example: Order the steps to go shopping. (1) make the shopping list (2) go to the supermarket (3) put the products in the shopping cart (4) go to the checkout and pay (5) carry the groceries home.

Description >> You must take the sequence of steps out of order and ask the person to order them.

Tips and recommendations >> You can conduct the activity in a more guided way (as explained in the description) or in a more open way, by not giving specific steps and asking the person to detail by themselves, step by step, how they would carry out the activity.





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A5. Walking

Type >> Physical and sensorial.

Benefits >> Improves quality of life, mood and physical health. Diminishes the typical urge to wander.

Suggested Time >> It can be adjusted to person's conditions.

Tools and conditions >> No tools are needed, look for walks in quiet and not over stimulating environments.

Description >> Take a walk together, you can even walk the dog or go to the grocery store. While you walk, a verbal task can be started (eg: find three adjectives that describe the surrounding area).

Tips and recommendations >> Distance and time spent can be adjusted to suit different fitness levels. It can also be used as social activity, if you organise group walks.





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A6. Videos (online)

Type >> Reminiscence.

Benefits >> Stimulates memory and aids meaningful conversations and bonding.

Suggested Time >> 60 minutes.

Tools and conditions >> Device with internet connection (eg: smartphone, laptop). Basic knowledge to perform searches on a video platform (eg: youtube).

Description >> Start a conversation about the past using videos as prompts and ask questions like: what do you think this video shows? when do you think did that take place? does it remind anything to you? Connect the content of the video with the person's day-to-day reality, in order to reinforce the work on recent memory, which is the most affected in early-stage dementia.

Tips and recommendations >> Do not rush, let them take their time while gently leading the conversation. Connect the contents of the video with recent events, people, etc., in order to focus on short-term memory.





Early Stage Dementia Activities

A7. Hobbies

Type >> Reminiscence.

Benefits >> Emotional and behavioural benefits. Elicits emotions and memories, entertainment. Promotes interconnection with the caregiver.

Suggested Time >> It can be adjusted to the person's condition and particular hobby.

Tools and conditions >> Calm and quiet environment, items that are related to the hobby.

Description >> Focus on a hobby that they used to enjoy and encourage them to talk about it (eg: cooking). You can use relevant items to promote discussion (eg: favourite herb).

Tips and recommendations >> It's important to choose a hobby that the person knows and enjoys, as they will be more likely to react positively to it.



Check what you learned...





Lessons Learned



In this module, we learned about the abilities and disabilities of a person who has been diagnosed in the early stage of dementia.



There are many activities which can help stimulate people in the early stage of dementia. In this module we learned a few of them, that can be easily done at home.



We also knew some tips which can support carers to improve the quality of caring and the quality of life of people with dementia.





Quizz Time!



1) Only a person in an early age can be diagnosed with early-stage dementia.

- True
- False

2) In the early stage of dementia, people can not function independently.

- True
- False

3) In the early stage of dementia, it is time to put legal, financial and end-of-life plans in place because the person with dementia will be able to participate in decision-making.

- True
- False

*Answers at
the end of
the
module!*

Extend your knowledge...





Glossary



Short term memory >> the capacity to store a small amount of information in the mind and keep it readily available for a short period of time. It is also known as primary or active memory. Short-term memory is essential for daily functioning, which is why experiencing short-term memory loss can be frustrating and even debilitating.

Cognition >> all forms of knowing and awareness, such as thinking, perceiving, conceiving, remembering, reasoning, judging, imagining, and problem solving. Along with affect and conation, it is one of the three traditionally identified components of mind. In other words, it is a term referring to the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension.

Cognitive stimulation activities >> involve a range of activities aimed at maintaining or improving cognitive function. It targets cognitive domains such as orientation, attention, memory, language, executive functions, gnosis, praxis, visuospatial skills, social cognition, etc.

Advanced-stage dementia >> Late stage of dementia, when the symptoms are severe and the impairments is irreversible. At this stage, the person becomes totally dependent and the worsening of symptoms often leads to the onset of other diseases.



Where to find more information



»» **Early-Stage Caregiving | Alzheimer's Association**

provides a range of practical information and advice on how to care for a person who is in their early-stage of Alzheimer's.

Link: <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/stages-behaviors/early-stage>

»» **Dementia UK**

the specialist dementia nurse charity in the UK. They offer a variety of resources, tips and practical information and advice to understand dementia and provide better care to people living with it.

Link: <https://www.dementiauk.org/>

»» **Tips for Caregivers and Families of People With Dementia | Alzheimer's.gov**

a complete guide with tips and advice for caregivers and families, elaborated by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Link: <https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/tips-caregivers>

»» **Activities for Dementia Patients: 50 Tips and Ideas to Keep Patients with Dementia Engaged | Seniorlink Blog**

a list of tips and ideas for keeping dementia patients active and engaged through everyday activities, outings, cognitively challenging tasks, and social and emotional activities.

Link: <https://www.seniorlink.com/blog/activities-for-dementia-patients-50-tips-and-ideas-to-keep-patients-with-dementia-engaged>

»» **Using Reality Orientation in Alzheimer's and Dementia | Verywell Health**

strategies and cautions in the use of reality orientation with Alzheimer's and Dementia patients.

Link: <https://www.verywellhealth.com/treating-alzheimers-disease-with-reality-orientation-98682>



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Question 1. False
Question 2. False
Question 3. True

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