



# Perspectives

*A Newsletter for Individuals with Alzheimer's or a Related Disorder*

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## Finding Meaningful Activity

The dictionary defines activity as “something that somebody takes part in or does – work, movement, or whatever somebody or something is doing.” By this definition, it would seem that almost any action is activity! With the onset of memory loss and related symptoms, however, many people experience changes in their daily activities. It may be harder to do some previously enjoyed activities or you may find that you need a little boost from others to stay involved. Despite the adjustments to memory loss and associated symptoms, there are many ways to find pleasure and meaning in your life.

Although there may be changes or adjustments in your social activity, it is also possible that new people can come into your life and open doors to new opportunities. Try to identify the people that make up your community. These people will be instrumental in working with you as you identify and create activity. Although it can be difficult to accept help or advice, even from someone who cares about you, it can also be a relief not to face challenges alone. You may not always like it when someone suggests things to do or you may be reluctant at first, or worried to take that step. But chances are, when a concerned person makes a suggestion, it can

Be valuable to keep an open mind and give it a try.

Many people with AD find enjoyment in physical activity and it is important to try to include physical exercise into your daily life. Movement releases endorphins in the brain that can help improve mood, ease stressors, and increase one's energy level. Many people continue to enjoy swimming, walking, bowling, playing tennis, or working in the yard.



Research confirms the importance of social support in managing stressful times and maintaining good quality of life. It is essential that some of your activity include interaction with others. Although changes in memory or language abilities can make some social situations more challenging, it is important to practice both expressing and listening to conversation. This may be

more easily done with others who have the same symptoms. Many people talk about the value of participating in a support group where it's comfortable and everyone is “*in the same boat.*” For others, one-to-one interactions are easier to manage than larger groups and spending time with just one or two people at a time may be more meaningful. It may also be easier to socialize around a particular event such as an outing to a park, zoo, museum, movie, play, or concert. This takes the emphasis

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## Meaningful Activity

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off of verbal communication and allows for enjoyable companionship based on a shared experience. Activity with others builds feelings of community and belonging that are important for well-being. One woman says, *"My friends don't really treat me much differently since I developed Alzheimer's. I've told them about my condition so if I do something goofy, I've got a good excuse!"*

Many people with Alzheimer's find travel to be a meaningful activity. One man says, *"When I travel to a new place, it takes my mind off of all my worries. I see new things and have different kinds of experiences than I do at home. I feel part of something bigger than my usual little world."* While some respond favorably to new places and routines, others find it disorienting or unsettling to be away from home for too long. Shorter weekend-length trips or a visit to more familiar territory such as the home of family or close

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friends can be preferable. It is often wise to practice with a few small trips to see how you handle travel before venturing out on a longer journey. Consider wearing a "Safe Return" identification bracelet while traveling in case of an emergency. Call your local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association for more information on this helpful program.

Sometimes we also need time for peace or solitude. Make time for quiet activity that is both interesting and relaxing. Books on Tape is an excellent resource for those who have difficulty reading and is available through most libraries. Others enjoy watching television or videos, listening to music, doing jigsaw puzzles, drawing and other crafts, or looking through photo albums or scrapbooks. Some find that keeping a journal or occasional notes about their day-to-day experiences is a helpful way to quietly reflect on one's thoughts and feelings.

Most people enjoy feeling helpful to others, or productive in some way, and caring about others can be an important activity. Spending time with grandchildren, taking care of a pet, or doing a household chore or other task to help your spouse, family, or friend can all be meaningful activities. Others do volunteer work in their community through local churches, health organizations, senior centers, or community service groups.

The desirable type and amount of activity will vary from person to person, but in the face of Alzheimer's, there are still many ways to be meaningfully involved in the world around you. Call your local Alzheimer's organization(s) to see if they offer specific activities for persons with memory loss. If they don't, offer to help them start something! See page 3 for an interesting new program in New York City that could be very inspiring.