

The Benefits of Art Therapy for Dementia

Art therapy stimulates the brain

Art projects are a fun, relaxing way for people of all ages to express their creativity, but they're particularly valuable for seniors with Alzheimer's or dementia.

Even though nothing will cure dementia, art therapy stimulates the brain in a multitude of ways. It can stir dormant memories and sometimes even encourages speech.

Art can also create a sense of accomplishment and purpose, while also providing an opportunity for nonverbal expression.

Studies have shown that art therapy activities even help boost cognitive function in various areas of the brain and enhance communication, brain function and social interaction in people with dementia.

The benefits of art therapy for dementia are immediately noticeable. Participants show both cognitive and behavioral improvement, plus an increase in confidence.

Create good moments, days, and hours with art therapy

The goal of art therapy is to create "good moments, good hours and good days," as Ruth Drew, director of family and information services for the Alzheimer's Association, says.

Art therapy for dementia can spark non-verbal seniors to smile, laugh, speak, or move. It's incredible to see someone who has extensive impairments come alive again.

The most effective forms of art therapy are ones that are built on personal passions and memories.

There's no "one size fits all" approach to art therapy. What's most important is considering your older adult's current abilities, preferences, and what's feasible in their living space. The idea is to set them up for success and enjoyment, rather than overwhelm or frustration.

Consider a wide variety of creative activities

Today, popular activities often go beyond the traditional drawing on paper.

Seniors enjoy sculpting with clay or dough, watercolor painting, paint by number projects, charcoal or pencil drawing, making cards, creating jewelry, participating in community art projects, and more.

For example, using modeling clay or dough (we love these bright colors) to create works of art is a wonderful way to engage someone with dementia.

It stimulates the senses, relieves stress, and helps boost hand strength. Many people also feel a great deal of pride and accomplishment in their creations.