

FREE BONUS • STOP THE CHAOS!

bonus 3

30-Day Brain Engagement

ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR DEMENTIA

A simple activity for every day of the month to keep the mind busy, lift mood and prevent boredom-driven behaviors.

DR. FERNANDO VERA, OT

DR. VERA'S DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS

WHY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

A bored brain finds its own things to do.

Pacing, rummaging, repeating questions, shadowing you from room to room, packing a bag to “go home”... many challenging behaviors start with the same thing: nothing meaningful to do.

Meaningful activity is one of the most useful non-drug tools in dementia care. Research on **cognitive stimulation** (group activities, conversation and games that gently use thinking skills) has found small improvements in thinking and quality of life for people with mild to moderate dementia. It won't stop the disease, but it can make each day calmer and more connected.



Uses what's still there

Activities build on lifelong skills (cooking, folding, singing) that often last much longer than short-term memory.



Lifts mood

Feeling useful and successful lowers anxiety, frustration and sadness.



Better days and nights

A busy, engaged day means less napping, less evening restlessness and better sleep.



Connection

Doing something together, side by side, is often easier than talking face to face.

DR. VERA'S TIP

Think “purpose,” not “entertainment.” “Could you help me with this?” works far better than “Do you want to play a game?”

HOW TO USE THIS CALENDAR

5 rules for activities that work every time

1. No right or wrong

Towels folded crooked are still folded. Never correct, never test. The goal is joy, not results.

2. Short and sweet

10–20 minutes is plenty. Stop while it's still going well.

3. Pick the best time

Morning and early afternoon usually work best. A 2 p.m. activity can head off 4 p.m. sundowning.

4. Set it up, then invite

Have everything ready on the table. Start doing it yourself and say, “Come help me.”

5. Use their life story

A retired teacher may love sorting papers; a mechanic, sorting nuts and bolts; a homemaker, folding linens. Swap any day for an activity tied to their past roles.

Adapt any activity to the stage

ACTIVITY	EARLY STAGE	MIDDLE STAGE	LATE STAGE
Baking	Follow a simple recipe	Stir, pour and scoop	Smell the dough, hold a warm cookie
Music	Make a playlist together	Sing along, clap, dance	Listen with headphones, hold hands and sway
Photos	Label and organize an album	Talk about one photo at a time	Look together while you tell the story
Gardening	Plant and care for a pot	Water plants, pull a few weeds	Touch soft leaves, smell herbs
Laundry	Fold and put away	Fold towels, match socks	Feel warm towels from the dryer

Days 1-15 *getting started*

MEMORY

HANDS

MUSIC

MOVE

SENSES

PURPOSE

CONNECT

CREATE

DAY 1

MEMORY

Photo stroll

Look through old photos together. Say "Tell me about this one," never "Do you remember?"

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 2

PURPOSE

Fold the towels

Hand over a basket of warm towels. It doesn't matter how they're folded.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 3

MUSIC

Name that tune

Play songs from their teens and 20s. Hum, clap and sing along together.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 4

HANDS

Button & coin sort

Sort a jar of large buttons or coins by color or size into a muffin tin.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 5

MOVE

Garden walk

Walk outside slowly. Stop to smell flowers, touch leaves and watch birds.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 6

PURPOSE

Bake together

Let them stir, pour and scoop cookie dough. Enjoy the smell and the result.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 7

CONNECT

Family call

Short video or phone call with a grandchild. Keep it 5-10 minutes and upbeat.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 8

SENSES

Hand massage

Slow hand massage with a lightly scented lotion like lavender or vanilla.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 9

MEMORY

Finish the saying

"An apple a day..." "Early to bed..." Old sayings are often remembered well.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 10

HANDS

Sock matching

Mix a pile of colorful socks and pair them up together.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 11

MOVE

Balloon toss

Bat a balloon back and forth while seated. Lots of laughs, no one gets hurt.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 12

PURPOSE

Old job box

Fill a box with items from their past work: tools, recipe cards, fabric, files.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 13

CREATE

Watercolor painting

Simple brushes and watercolors. Talk about the colors, not what it "should" be.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 14

MUSIC

Sing-along

Favorite hymns, carols or classic songs. Print the lyrics in large letters.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 15

PURPOSE

Set the table

Ask for help setting the table for lunch. Hand over one item at a time.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

Days 16–30 *building the habit*

MEMORY

HANDS

MUSIC

MOVE

SENSES

PURPOSE

CONNECT

CREATE

DAY 16

MEMORY

Then & now

Look at a magazine or newspaper. Talk about how prices and cars have changed.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 17

SENSES

Treasure bin

Hide small safe objects in a tub of dry rice or beans to find by touch.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 18

PURPOSE

Water the plants

Water plants or plant seeds in a pot. Check on them together each day.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 19

HANDS

Big-piece puzzle

A 12–36 piece puzzle with a familiar picture. Help find the edges first.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 20

MUSIC

Dance to their song

Play their wedding song or a favorite dance tune and sway together.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 21

CONNECT

Pet time

Visit with a calm pet, or hold a soft stuffed animal or robotic pet.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 22

MEMORY

Memory book page

Make one page: a photo, their name, and a few words about the moment.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 23

HANDS

Snap the green beans

Snap beans or peel oranges for dinner. Useful, familiar hand work.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 24

MOVE

Chair routine

Do the Seated Calm-Down routine from the Move to Calm guide together.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 25

SENSES

Smell jars

Coffee, cinnamon, lemon, peppermint. Guess the scent and share memories.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 26

MEMORY

Map of my life

Look at a map of places they lived or visited. Let them tell the stories.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 27

PURPOSE

Wash the dishes

Wash plastic cups and utensils in warm soapy water. Soothing and helpful.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 28

CONNECT

Old-time show

Watch a classic TV show or listen to old radio together, then chat about it.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 29

CONNECT

Card for someone

Write or dictate a short card to a grandchild or friend and mail it together.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

DAY 30

MUSIC

Celebration day

Favorite dessert, favorite songs and a look back at what they enjoyed most.

☐ Done ☺ ☹

THE SECRET WEAPON

Build their personal playlist

Music memories are stored differently from everyday memories and often last into the late stages. The right song can calm agitation, spark conversation and bring a smile when nothing else works.

Find the right songs

- ✓ Music from ages 10 to 30 matters most
- ✓ Their wedding song and dance-hall favorites
- ✓ Church hymns and holiday music
- ✓ Songs in their first language
- ✓ Ask family: "What did Dad always sing?"

When to play it

- ✓ **Upbeat** songs in the morning and for chores
- ✓ **Calm** songs before a bath or medications
- ✓ **Slow** songs at 3–5 p.m. and bedtime
- ✓ The same song daily as a routine signal

Write their top 10 here

#	SONG & ARTIST	BEST FOR (ENERGY / CALM / SLEEP)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

DR. VERA'S TIP

Watch their face, not the speaker. Tapping feet, humming or a softer face means you found a keeper. Agitation means skip it.

Troubleshooting

IF THIS HAPPENS...	TRY THIS
They say “No” or “I don't want to”	Don't push. Start the activity yourself nearby. Try again in 15 minutes, or offer a different one.
They say it's childish	Frame it as adult work: “I need help sorting these for the church sale.” Avoid anything that looks like a kids' game.
They get frustrated	Make it simpler: fewer pieces, one step at a time, or switch to a sensory activity like hand massage or music.
They lose interest after 2 minutes	That's okay. Two good minutes count. Try shorter activities more often through the day.
They repeat the same activity	Great! Repetition is comforting. Keep doing what they enjoy.
They become sad about memories	Acknowledge it: “You really miss her.” Hold their hand, then gently shift to music or a walk.

Signs an activity is a winner



Smiling

Relaxed face, laughter, humming.



Focused

Hands busy, eyes on the task.



Talking

Sharing stories or asking to do it again.

DR. VERA'S TIP

When you find an activity that works, write it on the tracker on the next page. By the end of the month you'll have a personal list of “calm makers” to use anytime.

PRINT AND KEEP ON THE FRIDGE

My “calm makers” tracker

Write down the activities that brought a smile, a calm afternoon or a good night's sleep. Share this list with family and aides so everyone knows what works.

#	ACTIVITY THAT WORKED	RATING ☆	BEST TIME / NOTES
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			

Choose activities that are safe for the person's abilities. Supervise the use of small objects, sharp items and hot surfaces, and check with their care team about any physical limits.