



Massachusetts Department of
Developmental Services (DDS)



Massachusetts Councils
on Aging (MCOA)



Center for Developmental Disabilities
Evaluation and Research

ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

GENERAL TIPS:

The term Activities of Daily Living, or ADL's, refers to the activities that take place each day to take care of one's body: bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, eating, and walking. As dementia progresses ADL care becomes more challenging for the individual and more dependent on caregivers.

There are some strategies to try when working with an individual with dementia to help ensure both safety and success. When giving instructions, minimize distractions, speak clearly using words familiar to the individual. Introduce one step at a time, and using physical, gestural or verbal cues is helpful. Keep choices simple and avoid open ended questions. Contrasting colors help when presenting objects or visual cues. Plan ahead, have all materials ready, and once you start, keep the activity moving. Don't rush, and keep your tone positive and friendly. Below are some specific suggestions for Activities of Daily Living (ADL's).



Walking from place to place

- Make sure that rooms are well lit and clutter free.
- Always make sure that the individual is alert.
- Tell the individual why she or he is getting up and where they're going.
- Make sure that they are positioned to stand with both feet on the floor and hips forward.
- Give verbal and physical guidance, as needed, but give as little support as necessary.
- Talk through changes in the environment, such as
"We're going onto carpet now." "Here's your room."
- If the individual is hesitant, try standing in front of the individual holding your hands out and guiding the individual as you walk backwards.
- If the individual walks independently, keep watching to make sure that they don't forget where they are.

Dressing

- Give only enough assistance so that individual can complete each task. The process should be smooth and not frustrating.
- Have the individual sit in a firm place such as their bed, a low chair is best.
- Name each piece of clothing and tell them what to do, "pull up your pants," "put the shirt over your head." May use gestures to demonstrate.
- Present the clothing so that the individual can succeed, for example hold the shirt so that they can put their arm through the sleeve.
- Present clothing that is appropriate for the weather and is already coordinated.

Dining

- Make sure the individual is seated comfortably in a low chair with arms, feet touching the floor, and lower back supported.
- An Occupational Therapist (OT) can assess and advise on whether and how to modify utensils and plates, for example with scoopbowls, or plate guards. The Service Coordinator can make the referral to OT.
- Speech or OT can advise on food textures or if you have questions about the individual's ability to chew or swallow food.
- You may need to prompt an individual to begin eating, using a verbal cue or placing a fork in their hand. Similarly you may need to prompt them to keep eating.

- Avoid distractions, and avoid objects at the table that could be confused with food.
- Use color contrasting plates to make food more easily seen.

Bathing, Toileting, and Oral Health Care

- Make sure all equipment is ready, for example, toothbrush, shower chair, soap, water at comfortable temperature.
- Make sure the bathroom is well lit.
- Identify or name the equipment (e.g. toothbrush). Be sure to use the word that the individual uses. Explain what each item is used for.
- Use cues to maintain the flow of the activity.
- Encourage the individual to start each task, but be prepared to finish for thoroughness.
- Early on, incontinence is not associated with physical symptoms of dementia. Save the person from embarrassing accidents by prompting the individual to use the bathroom at regular intervals.
- Use verbal or gestural prompts to help the person complete a task, but give only as much help as needed.
- Use wall rails for toileting and in the shower, and gently assist with sitting, as needed.
- Above all, respect the individual's modesty.