

Say “Cheese” and Support Memory Loss

One’s personal identity often comes from knowing where he is on his life timeline. With the onset of memory loss, one starts to lose his sense of personal identity. Fortunately there are ways to support this when living with a progressive dementia- Visual aids, especially photos, are helpful reminders. This holds true for people in early, middle, and late stage.

Image association through photographs plays a key role in allowing a loved one to reminisce about people and pleasant times in their past, as well as keeping them engaged in the present moment. It poses an opportunity to chronicle their experiences and their relationships, and becomes a concrete aid for remembering at a later date. Creating a scrapbook is a wonderful exercise, particularly for those who are experiencing memory loss. Looking through photos of friends and loved ones can help create positive feelings and contentment.

It is common for a person with memory loss to say, “I want to go home.” As one begins to understand the language of dementia, this statement communicates a longing for a time and place when he felt loved, safe, secure, and recognized people, places, and things. Assembling a photo album, scrapbook, or something along those lines, can support a loved one to create a sense of “home”—the sense of familiarity is comforting and secure.

Photos to put in the album include past and present shots of family members, caretakers, friends, and environments. By creating a timeline for your loved one, you give her the opportunity to re-visit past experiences, as well as connect with more



recent events and people in her life. If you are helping her journal, use simple language and make sure the writing is clear.

During this digital age, the camera on your phone can take quality photos, however, we may find that our ability to use the technology to our best advantage is not necessarily simple. There are several options that will work, whether using a digital camera, a phone, or a Polaroid camera. Fujifilm Instax Mini 9 creates photos that are about 4 x 4 inches and is known for being user friendly as well as simplicity. You can find it at Walmart, Amazon, or other retailers that carry cameras.

There are a number of other ways to save and share family photos. If you have the ability to go online, explore the features that Shutterfly offers to create simple photo albums. Shutterfly is an ecommerce company specializing in digital photographic products and services for both the general and professional photography markets. As part of a larger campaign and ongoing support, Shutterfly is supporting the Alzheimer’s Association in recognition of Alzheimer’s & Brain Awareness Month and The Longest Day, with a \$25,000 donation.

alzheimer's association®

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24-Hour Helpline:
800.272.3900

alz.org/CaCentral

Looking for something new to try?

Tips & Tools

- Clip coupons
- Sort Poker chips
- Count tickets
- Rake leaves
- Use the carpet sweeper
- Read out loud (Good Old Days Magazine)
- Bake cookies
- Look up names in the phone book
- Read the daily paper out loud
- Ask a friend, neighbor, church acquaintance who has a young baby or young child to visit
- Listen to polka music
- Plant seed indoors or out
- Look at family photographs
- Toss a ball
- Color pictures
- Make homemade lemonade
- Wipe off the table
- Weed the flower bed
- Have a spelling bee
- Read from the Readers' Digest
- Fold clothes

Reminiscence is generally a very positive and rewarding activity. If the person with dementia cannot participate verbally, it can still give them pleasure to be involved in reflections on their past. It can also be a means of distraction during moments of anxiety or stress. While reviewing past events can provide a sense of peace and pleasure, it can also stir up painful or sad memories that can be distressing. Consider the potential reactions to the pictures you choose when you assemble an album. Your goal is to produce pleasure and reduce anxiety.



Ways you can help a person with dementia to reminisce:

Place photos in chronological order. Photo albums can be great tools for chronicling someone's life history or telling a story about a salient event. Start your album at the beginning of the person's life and lead up to the present day. Keep the design simple, with one or two pictures per page.

Show relationships. To help spark recognition of family members, dedicate a section to each person. Choose a few photos that include your loved one with each family member during different stages of life.

Connect, don't correct. This is more about making a connection and sharing memories. Focus on connecting with the person, not correcting any erroneous memories they may have.

Select meaningful moments. Be sure to include photos that reflect the your loved one's meaningful life moments and depict his/her favorite hobbies or activities, such as weddings, graduations, and vacations.

Make it a shared activity. If appropriate, work together to create the album, and share memories and conversation as you put it together.

Engage in conversation. Ask open-ended questions about the people or events in the photo. *How were you feeling in that picture? Tell me about your brother. What are some of your favorite childhood stories? Tell me more about this picture.* The answers are less important than the conversation and engagement.

To enhance the concept of pictures sparking memory, take your loved one to visit an art museum.

This is a great activity for adults living with memory loss and related dementias in the early to middle stages as well as for their care partners. Gauge your loved one's stamina and interest level, and plan to be at the museum for about an hour and a half. Don't try to see everything, but target artwork where you both can sit and discuss the piece. Plan to see between three and four artworks and try to have a simple engaging theme that will spark her interest, for example, look at artworks that portray "life on the high seas." Although it might be a one-sided conversation, talk about the artwork, without pressing your loved one to comment on it beyond her ability.

Whatever the medium of choice, the purpose of a family scrapbook, photo album, or museum visit, is to enhance the experience of looking at photos and make it more participatory. In short, the advantages of scrapbooking are: it is a shared activity, it prompts memories, it is a relaxing and rewarding activity, it offers a starting point for conversation, and most importantly, it is something that can be revisited over and over again.

Research in the field of memory loss is continuing to show that creative engagement not only enhances the quality of life for participants, but also aids in better overall health.