



Caregiver's Guide:

**12 Ideas for**

**Senior Engagement**

*at Home*



Lately, it seems we're all spending a bit more time around the house. While isolation or social distancing may be necessary at times, it can also increase the risk of falling into depression, boredom, and deteriorating physical and cognitive health – especially for the elderly and those with age-related challenges.

For older adults, it's important to keep the mind and body engaged every day. Although it may take a bit more creativity, there are *plenty* of great ways to find happiness, exercise, and a sense of purpose while spending quality time together at home!

**Before we get started, it's important to remember these three tips when working with seniors with cognitive or physical challenges:**

1. Keep things age-appropriate. Activities shouldn't be too difficult or beyond your loved one's current level of ability, but they shouldn't be too easy, either. Childlike activities such as coloring in kids' activity books can feel insulting.
2. Remember safety. Always monitor your loved one if potentially dangerous tools (scissors, oven, etc.) are being used, or if there is risk for a potential fall.
3. This is about engagement and fun! Achieving a specific result or mastering an activity with perfection does not matter. Avoid correcting your loved one and let them complete activities how they understand them.

Read on for ideas to keep your loved one engaged and happy at home (you'll enjoy them as well)!



# 1

## BAKE OR COOK SIMPLE RECIPES TOGETHER



A great motivator to get off the couch is to get into the kitchen! You can spark nostalgic memories of old favorites with recipes from your loved one's cook books, or try out something new.

**Cooking has several benefits for mental health:**

- Offers a reward at the end (you get to eat your tasty project!)
- An outlet for creative expression: play with ingredients or presentation. Feel proud of what you create!
- The senses of smell and taste can trigger recollections of a favorite childhood treat, or a recipe your loved one used to prepare for your family.
- Cooking for others can be altruistic, giving the chef an opportunity to show love and care for others.

Need some ideas? Here are some simple recipes to get you started: [Quick and Easy Pizza Bagels](#), [Crunchy Granola Pretzel Sticks](#), [Apple Yogurt Parfaits](#)

# 2

## DREAM, LEARN, AND REMINISCE WITH BOOKS

Reading protects cognitive health, improves memory and concentration, and reduces stress. When you read together, it can also create opportunities for connection and conversation.

There are books for all reading ability levels, even picture books! Alzheimer's Association has created a wonderful list of reading material specifically for people with dementia: [check it out here](#).





## 3 TIDY THE HOUSE

Sure, housework is unlikely to be at the top of anyone's "fun list", but the benefits reach much further than that pile of dirty towels. When your loved one is able to participate in simple chores, they can gain a sense of purpose and feel like a contributing member of the household. Additionally, certain tasks offer opportunities for physical activity or cognitive functioning.

In fact, [a recent study](#) reports that a sense of purpose is associated with positive health outcomes among older adults, including "fewer chronic conditions, less disability, and reduced mortality."

Inviting your loved one to participate in household chores that are within their capability level.

### Some ideas are:

- sorting and folding laundry
- setting the table
- wiping the counters
- sweeping the floor

*Be mindful of any hazardous chemicals, slippery surfaces, or fall risks.*

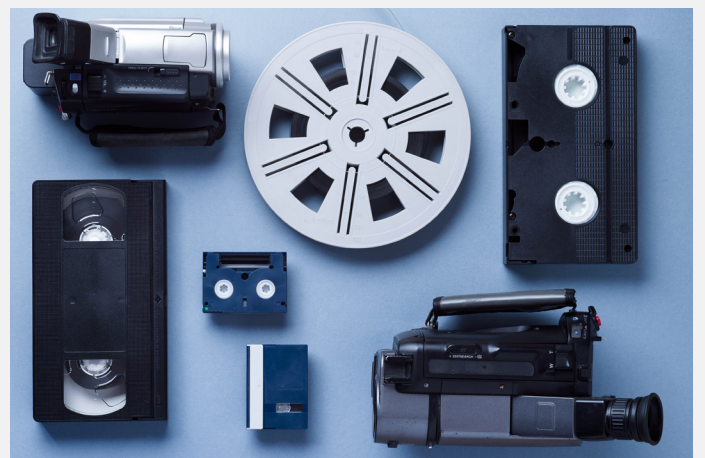
## 4 WORK ON A PUZZLE

There are simple puzzles with large, easy-to-grab pieces, and complex puzzles with thousands of pieces that take days to put together. Whichever kind you prefer, the activity of solving a puzzle is a perfect brain strengthening challenge and fun way to spend quality time together...teamwork!



## 5 WATCH FAMILY VIDEOS

Mix up family movie night, and spark fond memories of the "good ol' days" together! If your memories are still trapped on film reels or VHS tapes, there are several companies [like this one](#) that can convert them to DVD!







## 6 EXPLORE THE BENEFITS OF ART THERAPY

Art therapy is well known for its ability to benefit seniors, especially those with dementia. In fact, [several studies](#) show that creating art can offer vast improvements in cognition, fine motor skills, and communication in those experiencing cognitive decline.

Skill level and experience do not matter, as the end result is not what offers the benefits. Rather, the goal is simply in the process of relaxation, creative thinking, and happiness while crafting a project. Encourage self-expression and imaginative ideas – nothing they create is ever “wrong”.

There are several mediums that can be explored with art: painting, building, scrapbooking, photography and drawing are just a few ways to express yourself. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

[Painting with Oakwood instructor Adam](#), [Create Origami](#), [Photo Magnets](#), [Knit A Scarf](#), [Mosaic Tray](#)



## 7 GIVE A HAND MASSAGE

Physical touch is beneficial for health and wellbeing. In fact, a [2011 study](#) found that a hand massage can:

- reduce hand pain
- decrease anxiety
- induce a better mood
- improve sleep
- provide greater grip strength

[Check out this video](#) for the basics on hand massage for seniors.

# 8

## PLAY MUSIC, MAKE MUSIC, AND DANCE!

Music therapy can help achieve miraculous health benefits. In fact, a [study of stroke survivors in Finland](#) showed that those who listened to music daily throughout their recovery experienced improvements in memory, attention, and mood. At the end of the study, they were happier, less confused, and regained verbal skills faster than the control group who did not listen to music.

Another study by researchers at the University School of Medicine recently confirmed that musical therapy led to an increase in serotonin levels (the “feel-good” brain chemicals) in Alzheimer’s patients.

There are so many ways music can be enjoyed – so dust off that old guitar, create a beat on some bongo drums, sing along to your favorite classics, or bust a move! To check out a few ways we incorporate music in our own clubs, our instructor, Adam, has created [this fun video!](#)



# 9

## READ THE NEWSPAPER

It’s no secret that relaxing in a cozy chair with a cup of coffee in one hand and the “daily paper” in the other is a favorite pastime for many seniors. In fact, many people can spend hours perusing the paper: keeping abreast on current events, chuckling at witty comics, clipping coupons, and solving crossword puzzles.

News subscriptions are also available online, and may be preferable for some, due to their cheaper cost and wider range. However, those who are “technology averse” may find newspapers easier to read and navigate, or to share articles with those around them.





# 10

## DISCOVER YOUR GREEN THUMB

Gardening inspires health and wellbeing through physical activity and the act of caring for a living organism. For those who grow beautiful flowers or edible produce, nothing quite compares to the feeling of satisfaction from nursing along the formation of these beautiful (or tasty) forms of nature!

Container gardening is a fantastic option for seniors who have difficulty kneeling, or those living in less-than-ideal climates for growing. By utilizing various sized containers to plant in, you can place your garden indoors or in higher, easier-to-reach places.

**Examples of containers you can use:** Terra cotta pots • Bowls • Hanging baskets • Plastic pots • Metal planters • Planters w/ added trellises • Wash tubs • Wicker baskets • Hollow concrete squares • Raised garden beds on stands

# 11

## DON'T FORGET TO EXERCISE

Physical exercise is vital to everyone's health, and seniors are no exception. According to [this report](#), exercise offers older adults benefits such as:

- Helps maintain the ability to live independently and reduces the risk of falling and fracturing bones.
- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some people with hypertension.
- Helps people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and fosters improvements in mood and feelings of well-being.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.

There are various forms of exercise, suitable for all levels of physical ability. To help you get started, follow along with our physical therapist, Dr. Lauren in this [seated exercise in your chair at home](#) or follow along with [this group class](#) taught by three Oakwood Creative Care instructors.





## 12 VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

At times, we may need to adjust how we view socialization, fun, learning, and exploration. Fortunately, there are an increasing number of ways you can experience the world through virtual engagement.

To get you started, here are a few free tours of famous museums: [browse online exhibits at the Getty museum](#), [take a virtual tour through the Louvre](#), [virtually explore the National Museum of the United States Air Force](#), [experience the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History](#).

**Want more tips, fun ideas, and updates on available programs at Oakwood Creative Care?  
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