

Department of  
Occupational Therapy

# Sensory Stimulation for Persons with Dementia



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# WHAT IS:

## SENSORY STIMULATION

Sensory stimulation refers to using different techniques to stimulate the 5 senses, namely sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch.



### WHY SENSORY STIMULATION?

Providing persons with dementia the means to express themselves when they can no longer do so with words.

### BENEFITS

Sensory stimulation can:



(1) Increase alertness and/or

(2) Calm the person down and help him/her to relax.

Sensory stimulation aims to increase alertness, reduce agitation, and enhance quality of life.

# WHAT IS:

## SENSORY STIMULATION

Every individual responds differently to different stimuli:

- The same stimulus may be relaxing for one but increases alertness for another
  - E.g. Person A might get agitated when touched but Person B might find the touch of a loved one to be soothing
- Family members and carers should take note of what works best at increasing one's alertness or relaxing the person
- Sensory stimulation also works best when it is in line with the interests of the person

It is suggested to only **provide 1 to 2 stimulations at each time**. Providing multiple stimulations may cause confusion/agitation in the person and bring about more behavioural issues instead.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING SMELL



### INTRODUCTION

Some of our strongest memories / important associations are triggered by our sense of smell.

A smell can help trigger a pleasant memory or experience that had occurred in his/her past.

Consider the following scents commonly found around the house:

1. Spices (e.g. cloves, cinnamon, ginseng, pandan leaves, curry leaves)
2. Fragrance oils (e.g. peppermint, lavender, lemongrass)
3. Citrus
4. Coffee



# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING SMELL



Create conversations regarding the scents of day-to-day tasks: e.g. Freshly brewed coffee, baking of bread, fresh laundry



Create or visit sensory gardens (Eg. Hort Park) with fragrant flowers or herbs



# SUGGESTIONS FOR: STIMULATING TASTE



*\*\*Speak to Medical Team/Speech Therapist to comment on food consistency if there are concerns with swallowing*

## INTRODUCTION

Taste can evoke memories as well as emotions. Taste is also highly personal so family members need to have a clear understanding of the likes and dislikes of the care recipient.



- Introduce a variety of food with different tastes and texture (e.g. citrus fruits, sour plums, milk, yoghurt)
- Discuss about favourite foods, foods eaten during special occasions, memories of food/food places the care recipient visited in the old days

# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING SIGHT



### INTRODUCTION

Our sense of sight allows us to gain information about our surroundings and helps us in doing our daily activities. Vision is one of the more commonly affected senses in persons with dementia.



- Look at common everyday objects e.g. mirror, television, broom, teapot.
- Discuss the use of the item(s).



# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING SIGHT



- Look at old photographs of family, friends, places of interests.
- Discuss the event and what was going on when the picture was taken.
- Bring the person to look and observe his/her surroundings - e.g. parks, coffeeshop, places of interests
- Consider enlarging the photographs for persons with low vision



# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING SIGHT



- If the person is bedbound - one can also consider using lights as a form of stimulation, or opening the windows and curtains in the room in the day



- Consider decorating the home with colourful decor e.g. wallpaper, flowers and plants
- Use calming colours like green, blue, and light pink to create 'calm' spaces to relax in.

# SUGGESTIONS FOR: STIMULATING HEARING



## INTRODUCTION

Familiar sounds or voices of loved ones are useful for mood enhancement and relaxation. Tuning in to sounds is also a critical part of connecting with our senses.



Use sounds that are personally relevant to the care recipient, or are meaningful to the person e.g. radio, favourite songs, TV, family member's voice, musical instruments.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR: STIMULATING HEARING



Make tape recordings of familiar songs or sounds of nature like falling rain, waves or birds chirping.



Help the care recipient enjoy the different sounds by getting him/her to close his/her eyes, and describe a situation where such sounds can be heard.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR: STIMULATING HEARING



Let the person share whatever associations that comes to his/her mind.



Avoid loud sounds that might frighten or startle the person.



# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING TOUCH



### INTRODUCTION

We find comfort and assurance from physical contact. A firm touch can help to calm someone down and different types of tactile stimulation has also been shown to improve wellbeing in persons with dementia.

### 1. Hand Massage

*\*\*Note: Not suitable for individuals with existing cardiac conditions, sensory issues, unable to verbalise pain, open wounds, burns or fragile/sensitive skin.*



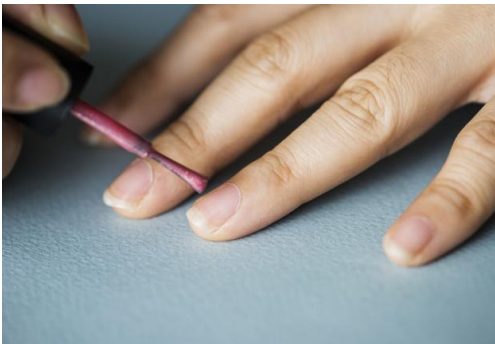
Apply a generous amount of moisturiser/lotion prior to massage.

Gently pressing the palm and rubbing the knuckles may help persons with dementia reduce their agitation during morning care routines.

# SUGGESTIONS FOR: STIMULATING TOUCH



Have various pieces of familiar fabric in various textures for touch and reminiscence



Engage in a beauty pamper session – groom nails, comb hair, apply face masks

# SUGGESTIONS FOR:

## STIMULATING TOUCH



### 2. Feet Massage in Warm Water

*\*\*Not for individuals with diabetes or sensory problems*

*\*\*Do check with a doctor regarding concerns/  
precautions if any*

Research has found that ten minutes of foot massage reduced agitated behaviour symptoms such as verbal aggression, wandering and repetitive movements



- Back and feet massage with aromatherapy oils
- Discontinue use if skin allergies or irritation occurs.

**\*\* Remember to clean off aroma oil from feet after the massage to prevent the person from slipping and falling down**





Disclaimer: “Sensory Stimulation for Persons with Dementia” is meant for your personal reference but does not replace professional advice.

Please consult your Occupational Therapist if you require further clarification.

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