

# GAMES FOR HEALTH



ACTIVITIES

**Does your loved one like to play games? Were they competitive in their younger years? Just because they might be at diminished mental or physical capacity does not mean that they can't participate in competitive activities now.**

Being happily engaged in games or activities has many health benefits for your older adult. It can reduce agitation, anxiety, depression and anger. It can give them a sense of purpose and a feeling of being successful at something. Participating with you or other loved ones provides them social time and can encourage conversation. A game is an easy way to involve other family members who might be struggling with how to interact with their older relatives.



**Some activities and games to explore with your loved one might include:**



**A home-made puzzle.** Print a copy of their favorite family photo or vacation location. Laminate the photo and cut it into four or more puzzle piece shapes. Multiple photos can be stored in separate baggies for variety. Choose puzzles with more pieces on days they seem especially sharp and ones with fewer for the days they are feeling challenged. Help them succeed.



**Cards.** Purchase large print playing cards and perhaps a card holder. Games like Solitaire, Go Fish, Blackjack, Crazy Eights, Gin Rummy, or War are wonderful for someone in early dementia. Someone in late-stage dementia might simply enjoy shuffling or separating the cards by color or suit. If they seem overwhelmed by the quantity of cards, remove some before starting your games to make them easier to handle.



**Bingo.** This can be done at home or find a local senior center that offers this activity for more social interaction for your loved one.



**Bean bag toss.** This can be done either standing or sitting but is a fun game for your older adult to play with grandchildren. You can put pieces of paper on the floor with points for the easiest version or use plastic dog bowls with points written on them in permanent marker for a slightly more challenging target.



**Indoor golf.** If your loved one used to golf and is unable to get out on the course any longer, consider an indoor putting mat. It can be used either from a sitting or standing position. For an older adult with dementia, the muscle memory might still be there. If they tend to throw items, ensure that the putter and ball are of softer or foam materials to reduce in-home damage. Monitor the activity for frustration and try to redirect to a new activity if it seems too challenging.



**Checkers.** Use a larger board and pieces if small motor movements are difficult.

Source: [Daily Caring](#)

### Do Memory Games Work?

At some point in your research for activities for your older adult, you will find organizations that tout memory games for preventing Alzheimer's. While there is no solid evidence that these games help prevent the disease, they can help provide mental and social stimulation which can be helpful in the moment and can help slow the progression.

Any activity which inspires social interaction creates happiness, which is beneficial no matter what age-related challenges your loved one might be suffering.

Challenging our brains in new ways will create new neural pathways and strengthen existing ones, helping us to be more flexible when faced with mental or physical challenges.



#### Some ideas for memory or brain games that can help include:

- Crossword Puzzles
- Jigsaw Puzzles
- Sudoku Puzzles
- Online games such as those provided by [Lumosity.com](https://www.lumosity.com)
- Memory Card Games

Since these sorts of games can also result in frustration if they are beyond the capacity of the person playing them, monitor your loved one closely and suggest a different game or activity if they are struggling.

Source: [Everyday Health](https://www.everydayhealth.com) and [Cognitive Vitality](https://www.cognitivevitality.com)



#### Safety Note

If your loved one tends to put things in their mouth or twist items in their hands, avoid games and activities that include sharp objects, small items, string, or things that will break when bitten.



### Online Games

Many popular games also have online versions if you do not have family members available to engage with your loved one.

Find versions for your older adult to put on their tablet or computer that have larger fonts, fewer rules and easy-to-understand interfaces. If possible, set one up as an icon on the main screen of their device so that it is easy to access.

If sitting up straight is something that your loved one's medical team is working on, consider purchasing one of many tablet or cell phone holders that brings the device up to eye level so that your loved one is not hunched over for extended periods to play their favorite digital games.

Source: [Med Crave](https://www.medcrave.com)

