

Alzheimer Café IW



Spring 2020 – Keeping in touch



A reminder that Spring has arrived and better times are ahead. We've waited along time for summer.

I have been in isolation for over three weeks now and like most people I'm fed up but resigned to at least another three weeks if I am to give myself the best chance of beating this virus.

I am in touch with some of you and my thoughts are especially with those who cannot visit relatives and friends in isolation. I can only imagine the distress this causes. Thank goodness for those professional carers in whom we place our trust. I know from experience how dedicated they are and how much they strive to make residents feel safe and part of a family.

How are you managing to fill your day?

Here are a few tips.

Firstly, recognise the importance of **structuring your day**.

- A getting up routine.
- Breakfast.
- Mid morning coffee/tea break.
- Lunch
- Afternoon tea break.
- Tea time.
- Evening snack.
- A bedtime routine.

Keep to the same timings to establish a routine.



Getting down is not a problem.....

But this is the easy part. What about the times in between?

TV. Blessing or curse? We know that an early casualty of memory loss is recalling recent events and that an interest in 'soaps' is soon lost but that people still recognise the theme tunes and sounds of the characters voices. This is especially so for *The News* and frequent reminders of the dangers of contracting a deadly virus, daily death tolls and pictures of people in distress. These will be stored in the emotional memory and help build up fear that can produce anxiety. Such soundbites can cause flashbacks to WW2, The Falklands and other traumatic events. *One person with dementia ran out of their home and refused to re-enter, trying to explain to their partner that 'it' could be anywhere, brought in by anyone; "Keep yourself safe!" To her 'safe' meant outdoors in the fresh air, hence the fear of re-entering their home.*

(Dr Gemma Jones TAD newsletter April 2020)

This is a logical response but one that we suppress because our ability to use logic and to reason has not been compromised. We can do ourselves and our partners a favour by limiting exposure to news. I listen to the eight o'clock Radio 4 news and the six o'clock BBC TV news. That's it! I log on to IW Echo or County Press on line during the early evening to keep abreast of local developments. I certainly avoid social media with its well meaning contributors spreading alarm, ill-considered opinions and false news.

I think it is best to avoid information overload and concentrate on making each day purposeful.

The pick and mix approach

My wife used to get more pleasure from choosing her mix than from eating them. We always restricted the choice to three large or four small varieties and never more than £1.25. She could never remember what she chose last time but she thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I miss those weekly visits to Shanklin.



I'm going to suggest **twelve** types of **activities** from which to make a choice. You may think of others so this is just a suggestion from which you can **pick and mix**.

Aim to do **four sessions daily**, starting with one between breakfast and mid morning coffee, another leading up to lunch, after lunch and finally the last one between afternoon tea and evening snack. This will give you four planned sessions which is not a lot in terms of planning but it will certainly provide a structure for the day and help you, as a carer, feel that you have **accomplished something together**.

- 1. Try to communicate:** make a phone call, compose an email, write a letter, Skype/Facetime/Whats app or Messenger. Make an effort to stay in touch if possible.
- 2. Engage:** do an activity together. Play a game, a card game, an electronic game, word game.....(I remember playing Snap and us both having hysterics.....)
- 3. Do something 'Arty':** a simple card, a collage, some sewing, knitting, add to your Memory Book. What ever it takes that involves both of you.
- 4. Food preparation.** Laying the table. Peeling potatoes. Making a cake if you really want to push the boundaries. It is important to encourage participation in every day events but be prepared to 'help out' and above all know that at some stage you will have to exercise diplomacy. (I remember changing the bed sheets only to find the clean ones in the laundry basket a while later. Alas for good intentions.)
- 5. Make an observation about outdoors.** Look outside and make a point of picking out an attractive feature. The weather. Spring flowers. A blue sky. The cat on the lawn. This may lead to reminiscence.
- 6. Make the table look nice.** Clear it off. Add placemats or even a table cloth. Put a decoration in the middle. Make an effort to create a good mealtime experience. (Not every day but now and again though I would caution against tv laptop meals.) The value comes in working together and anticipating a social event. No matter if the cutlery looks odd! I have eaten many a cheesecake with a fish knife and thoroughly enjoyed it.
- 7. Make collections.** My wife liked sewing and she had a big collection of Laura Ashley fabric patches that she intended to make into a quilt. She would spend hours sorting through and matching up colours and patterns. The table would be covered. However, she had a phobia concerning buttons so that was a 'no go' though I have seen many attractive patterns made from buttons, leaves, flowers, sticks and shells etc. The possibilities are endless.
- 8. Reminisce.** Start with photos. Label them for future reference. (Don't forget the Memory Book). Pictures of household items from the internet. Local history groups on line. (I discovered my wife's conductress badge from when we were students and working on *The Vectis* as a crew. This unlocked so many memories; she relived that summer of 1967 and it is a memory I cherish to this day.)
- 9. Music.** If you have a shared interest so much the better. If not, well, here lies the challenge. Music can be a most evocative medium; unlocking memories from the furthest recess of the brain. Fortunately, we can usually find something that does the job. This is where CD's come into their own as they often have distinctive covers so making a selection adds to the enjoyment.

10. Hobbies. Where possible, keep a hobby alive by doing a little often. Skills involving dexterity will decline so something like knitting/carpentry will present a challenge but can still provide enjoyment. Make positive but sensible comments to encourage and avoid any temptation to compare with the past. It is important to encourage a sense of independence for as long as possible. Some people will persevere longer than others but with interest comes contentment.



11. Thoughts from the past. Recall specific events from the past that mean a lot to you. This may require a little planning to get photos/artifacts in place but could trigger some interesting responses. It also helps to cement a bond and prevent isolation.

12. Sayings or quotes that inspired you. From a news source (not doom and gloom!) or something a grandchild has said or done.



None of these is prescriptive. They are suggestions and you may create one or more of your own.

Recording activities....



This is a key part of the strategy. Keep a notebook on the kitchen table and jot down comments.

What follows is an extract from Gemma's April TAD 2020 news sheet:

Dad is living with one of his daughters and has been diagnosed with early Alzheimer's so since isolation began, the rest of the family have been unable to visit and have been keeping in touch by telephone.

"After a week we started using this 'notebook format' to reminisce with dad about what had been happening in recent days – especially when he asks questions like: "What are we supposed to do now? What's happening?" and "Why aren't you at work?"

It was also useful to have some tidbits of daily news at our fingertips when speaking to other family and friends on the phone. Their phone calls are more frequent now since they can't visit but they were also becoming somewhat repetitive. When asked, "How are you and what have you been doing today?", dad can be prompted to relate some specific details from the notebook rather to say, "I'm fine. Same as always."

Most recently, dad started looking through the notebook when sitting alone at the table; sometimes making doodles and drawings on the blank sides of the pages and margins and writing some words. We know he can read some phrases but we aren't sure how much he can read of all that's written there - but - he certainly enjoys looking through the notebook. This has given us the idea to leave a mug full of pens, pencils and some colouring pencils on the table so they are always within dad's reach when he wants to write or draw something.

This has been such a success that daily notebook entries will continue when the times of home-confinement are over."

This family demonstrates how a structured day has a positive effect on the way they care for dad. It is not hit or miss and certainly not written in stone. Flexibility and knowledge has enabled them to provide care appropriate to the needs of their father. There is no “one size fits all” with regard to care. It takes a lot of thought, trial and a few errors but it is well worth facing a day with direction.



The alternative is to try and navigate without a rudder and that is not an option in our boat!

How are you coping?

My biggest problem is being unable to socialise. I have been isolated for over three weeks now so I am just about used to it. I am well organised regarding food deliveries and being 70+ accept **that I really must not venture out**. Thank goodness for Whatsapp etc. I registered as a “vulnerable” but soon realised it wasn’t much use unless you have an official “**very vulnerable**” rating but thanks to good neighbours and Medina Foods, I am better provisioned than usual.

If you have a problem, contact **823600** which is a dedicated Help Line for people who are vulnerable. **You will get help** thanks to the hundreds of volunteers throughout the Island who have pledged their support.

Best regards and wishing you patience and strength in these unusual times.

From all of us at Alzheimer Cafe IW.