

Maggie Beer's BIG MISSION MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

Staying busy not only enhances the quality of life of older adults but also contributes to longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives. Find out how to keep seniors occupied in meaningful activities.

In this worksheet we learn;

- ✓ What is an activity & what are the benefits of activities
- ✓ Why participation may decline with ageing
- ✓ How to select the right activity
- ✓ How to plan an activity
- ✓ How to facilitate an activity
- ✓ Activity ideas for older adults

What is an activity?

An activity can be defined as “any action or task that a person engages in, typically to achieve a particular aim or to occupy their time”.

Everything we do in a day could be classed as an activity, for instance - getting dressed, having a meal, engaging in a hobby, or sleeping.

An activity becomes meaningful when it resonates with a person's values, interests, and goals, and when it fulfills one or more psychological or physical needs.

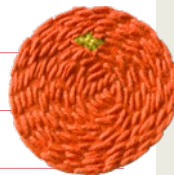


Why participation may decline with ageing?

Older people's participation in activities may start to decline over time for many reasons including:

- ✓ Reduced hearing, vision or ability to communicate
- ✓ Aged related changes such as reduced mobility, pain and fatigue
- ✓ Effects of medical conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's disease or stroke
- ✓ Mental health conditions like anxiety or depression
- ✓ Reduced motivation and loss of interest
- ✓ Being unable to drive or travel
- ✓ Having smaller social circles

Moving into residential care can pose further issues, as people are away from their home, routine, family and friends.



What are the benefits of activities?

There are many health benefits associated with participation in activities, including:

Physical - Keeping fit and active; using remaining abilities, developing new skills.

Mental - Stimulation, challenge, utilisation of skills and abilities e.g. comprehension, concentration, processing, insight, judgement, sequencing, awareness, and memory.

Social - Socialisation, communication, forming new friendships, creating a sense of routine.

Emotional - Stress release and relaxation, enjoyment, pleasure, self-esteem, identity, motivation, belonging.

Spiritual - Expression of creativity

Sensory - Stimulation of the senses, e.g. touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell.

Therefore, it is important to consider ways to help older adults to continue to participate, so they can access these health benefits.



How do I select the right activity?

- 1. Consider their interests** - always try to build on their areas of interest so it is relevant to them, for example, if they loved fishing, consider related activities (sorting tackle, rigging up a line, watching fishing shows, reading fishing magazines, etc).
- 2. Build on strengths** - Your loved one may not be able to complete the full task. Look for aspects that they can still do, e.g. they may not be able to cook a full dinner, but they can peel vegetables.
- 3. Purposeful** - try to ensure the activity has a goal, product or outcome, to give it meaning, e.g. arranging flowers to have on the dinner table, writing Christmas cards.
- 4. Keep it simple** - it doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate, often simple chores are a great way to keep someone busy. Complex tasks like chess or driving require a lot of skill and concentration so try to think of tasks with less steps.
- 5. Engagement is the key** - Even though it may be quicker and easier to do a task yourself, your loved one needs the benefits of engagement, so help them to stay involved.
- 6. Safety** - it is important to consider all the safety aspect associated with the activity, e.g. risk of falls, chemicals or small parts which could be ingested, sharp items which could cause injury.
- 7. Consider the senses** - provide the person with different sensory inputs to stimulate their sight, taste, sound, smell, movement and touch.
- 8. Seek support** - if you are having difficulty thinking what to do with your loved one, consider speaking to an Occupational Therapist who works with older adults.

What are some examples of activities that older adults may enjoy?

This table provides a range of activity ideas to keep your loved one occupied.

The person may be able to do some of these activities on their own, or after you set them up, others may need to be done together. Ideally, we want the person to perform a mixture of activities from all categories throughout the week to give variety and to utilise different skills.



Table of activities



Games	Movement	Cooking
Cards e.g. patience, rummy, poker	Going for a walk	Washing
Board games e.g. snakes and ladders, Yahtzee, scrabble	Doing exercises prescribed by a physio	Ironing
Chess / draughts / checkers	Moving to music	Folding
Dominoes	Housework	Organising
Jigsaws	Gardening	Sorting
	Hand massage	Dusting
	Singing	Fixing
	Yoga / Tai Chi	Thinking
		Gardening
Thinking	Technology	Outings
Books	Mobile phone lessons	Cafes / restaurants
Magazines e.g. National Geographic, Women's Weekly	Social media	Pubs
Puzzle books	Games	Day trips
Word games	Emails	National Park
Old photos	Zoom / Facetime	River or beach
Discussing the news	YouTube	Op shops
Reminiscing	Radio	Shopping centre
Reading poetry or short stories	Music – play lists, CDs	Garden centre
Writing letters	Netflix or DVDs – old time favourites, musicals, concerts	Galleries
Life story work	Wii	Museum
Guest speakers	Photography	Movies
	Talking books / Kindle	Theatre
		Live music
		Places of worship
Hobbies	Spiritual	Social
Arts & crafts	Prayer	Writing letters
Knitting & crocheting	Rosary	Sending texts / emails
Sewing / embroidery	Meditation	Facetime / Zoom
Wood work	Mindfulness	Visiting friends
Painting	Online sermons	Entertaining
Drawing	Hymns	Family events
Fishing	Volunteering / helping	Social media



What do I need to consider when facilitating an activity?

When engaging your loved one in an activity:

Set them up for success – set up a suitable space, reduce distractions, reduce noise or interruptions.

Provide clear instructions – show them how to do the task. Repeat or simplify the instructions if necessary.

Do not rush – allow the person time to participate and match their speed

Try not to take over – the aim is for the person to do as much as possible themselves. Sit back and let them lead.

Failure free – there is no wrong answer or wrong way – if they fold the towels a different way to how they are folded in your linen cupboard, that is ok.

Give encouragement – highlight what the person has done well, celebrate successes.

Know the limit – cease the task after ~20min to give them a break from concentrating. Older people can fatigue easily, and may become unsettled later in the day if they are overtired.

Observe the person – watch for signs of fatigue, overstimulation, or disinterest, and adapt or change the activity if needed.

Plan for the future – Determine if the person enjoyed the activity, and plan what to do differently next time



What we did for **MAGGIE BEER'S BIG MISSION**

During Maggie Beer's Big Mission, we found that many of our residents were feeling bored or isolated.

The activity program lacked variety and tended to cater for those requiring a moderate level of care, meaning that residents who were relatively well were not being challenged, and residents with complex health issues were not being well catered for. When residents were asked if they wanted to do more, the majority said "Yes!"

Here are some of the ways we engaged the residents during the experiment:

1. CHORES

– watch episode 3 on ABC iview to see what happens when residents were invited to help in daily mealtimes tasks.

We commenced a morning "Helping Hands" group Monday – Friday from 9.30-10.00am, where residents were invited to help in daily tasks relating to mealtimes like they would do at home, including:

- Wiping – tables, trays, condiments
- Polishing and sorting cutlery
- Setting tables – tablecloth, cutlery, condiments
- Arranging flowers
- Ironing – tablecloths & serviettes
- Restocking – sugar, pepper, salt
- Rinsing dishes before being put through the dishwasher
- Sweeping and mopping the floor

The typical residents who enjoyed helping were the residents who found the activity program too easy, instead they were able to use their time productively.

Not only did this help the staff, but it fostered a sense of community. The residents really enjoyed helping, stating that they "liked to feel useful" and that it "helped to pass the time".

2. TASK BOXES

– watch episode 2 on ABC iview to see the residents using person-centred task boxes.

For our residents living with memory loss, we engaged them in Task Boxes. Task Boxes contain all the required equipment to do a simple, repetitive task such as rolling wool, folding tea towels or sorting buttons. The boxes have been carefully designed according to Occupational Therapy and Montessori Principles, to cater for people with declining abilities, who can find chores or the group activities too complex.

The site purchased a set of 20 boxes for each floor, which were available for staff and families to use with their loved one. All staff received training in how to use the Task Boxes, especially as a way to settle residents displaying signs of agitation. During the later part of the experiment, at 1.30pm each afternoon, Care Partners were mentored whilst using the boxes with suitable residents, to increase their skill and confidence.



3. THERAPY GROUPS

– watch episode 2 on ABC iview to see the residents' discussion group.

Throughout the project, we hosted speech pathology students from Curtin University. The students complemented the existing activity program with new therapeutic groups, designed to promote conversation and reminiscence. **The groups were:**

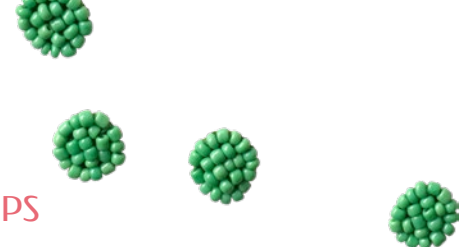
Food thoughts

A discussion group for high functioning residents which explored fond food memories like catching, growing, storing, preserving, cooking and baking food.

News & views

This group for males, who are often more isolated, featured news articles and discussion questions around areas of interest voted on by participants such as sport, gardening and famous inventions.

We encourage you to seek partnerships with local schools, TAFEs or universities, as it can be a win - win, e.g. students need to learn how to communicate with older adults, and older adults enjoy the company of the younger generations and to feel as though they are able to help people in their careers.



4. GARDEN AREAS

– watch episode 1 on ABC iview to see the residents’ garden club.

Josh Byrne helped us to refresh our courtyards. This encouraged people to spend more time outside, and helped them to get back into gardening, a much-loved pastime for many residents.

In each area we provided gardening tools such as:

- Broom, rake
- Long handled dustpan and bin
- Secateurs, trowel, spade
- Gardening gloves
- Hose reel
- Watering can



There are so many activities that can be done outside, for any level of ability, e.g. gardening, bird watching, picking flowers, mindfulness.

5. COMMUNITY ART PROJECT

– watch episode 3 on ABC iview to see the residents paint a mural on the balcony courtyard.

We partnered with a community artist to create a large mural on a wall of a balcony courtyard. Over a couple of weeks, residents, staff and family were able to paint areas of the mural, like a “paint by numbers”. The residents enjoyed contributing to the project and would proudly point out the area that they painted to their families, with one family member commenting, *“The mural is a great idea – it is very relaxing out there. Mum loves to talk about how she helped paint the mural”*.

Other community projects could include ideas like mosaics, colouring, recycling, and upcycling.



6. COOKING

– watch episode 3 on ABC iview to see Maggie cooking scones with Merle.

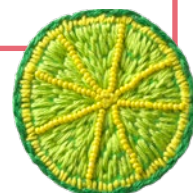
Of course, one of the residents’ favourite activities during the experiment was cooking with Maggie Beer herself! Maggie taught residents and families how to make orange marmalade, which they proudly took home in jars and had for breakfast. Maggie also baked scones with resident Merle, who had worked professionally as a cook at a motel in Tasmania.

Cooking has so many benefits – it stimulates the brain by reading and following instructions, the hands through measuring and mixing, and the senses through smelling and tasting, as well as bringing satisfaction at being able to cook for yourself and others. It also enables the handing down of recipes between generations and the retention of cultural traditions.

There are many ways to simplify cooking such as breaking it into small steps with the older adult doing the bit they can do (like mixing the bowl or icing the cake), cooking simple recipes like old fashioned slices, looking through recipes, or sharing food memories.

As the famous saying goes, “use it, or lose it”! The more that older adults can be engaged in meaningful activities, the more they can remain in a state of wellbeing. We challenge you to engage a senior in a meaningful activity today!

This Meaningful Activities worksheet has been written by
Change Care Consultant and Occupational Therapist Elizabeth Oliver.



Watch **MAGGIE BEER’S BIG MISSION** on ABC iview.



Artemis
Media

ABC



Screen
Australia



Maggie Beer's BIG MISSION

Meaningful Activities

Tool 1 Activity Checklist

Using these prompts can help gather comprehensive feedback from older adults, ensuring that their opinions are heard and valued.

Name: _____

SPORT	READING	INDOOR GAMES/HOBBIES
Basketball	Fiction	Art and Craft
Boating	Hobbies/Crafts	Bingo
Bowling Type:	Magazines Type:	Beauty/Care/Pampering Type:
Cars/Motor Bikes	Nature Type:	Board Games Game:
Cycling	Newspapers/Current Affairs	Cards Game:
Dancing Type:	Non-Fiction	Carpentry
Darts	Poetry	Chess/Draughts/Checkers
Football	Romance	Chores List:
Fishing	Short Stories	Computer/Nintendo/Wii
Golf	Talking Books	Cooking
Gym/Exercise Class	Thrillers/Suspense	Craft
Horse Riding/Racing/Trotting	War	Crosswords/Puzzles/Quizzes
Indoor Sport (skittles, quoits)	Other:	Current Events/News Reading
Netball		Discussion
Olympics	MUSIC	Dominoes
Pool/Billiards	Classical	Drama
Rugby	Concerts	Entertainment
Soccer	Country/Western	Fashion
Swimming	Easy Listening	Flower Arranging
Tennis	Folk	House Work
Walking	Instrumental	Jigsaws
Yoga/Pilate/Tai Chi	Jazz	Knitting/Crocheting
Other:	Musicals List:	Men's Club
	Old Time List Era:	Painting/Drawing

TV/MOVIES/RADIO	Opera/Light Opera	Photography
Comedy	Playing Instrument:	Reading/Book Club
Current Affairs/News	Relaxation	Reminiscing
Documentaries/Education	Hymns, Songs of Praise	Scrabble
Drama/Soaps	Rhythm and Blues	Sewing/Embroidery/Tapestry
Game Shows	Rock 'n' Roll	Singing
Health and Wellbeing	Sing-a-long	Socialising
Law/Politics	Other:	Story Telling
Movies Type:		Woodwork
Music	OUTINGS	Writing e.g. Letters/Stories
Nature	Art Gallery	Other:
PLays/Theatre	Casino	
Politics	Movies	OTHER
Sport	Museum	Animals/Pet Therapy Type:
Talk Back	Nature	Collecting Type:
Thriller/Suspense	Picnics/BBQ	Driving
Other:	Pubs	Education
	Restaurant/Coffee Shop	Entertaining
LEISURE TIME	Seaside/River	Gardening
On Own	Shopping	Guest Speakers
Small Group	Sightseeing/Scenic	Play Group/Children
Large Group	Theatre	Social Drinking Drink:
Indoors	Other:	Social Clubs
Outdoors		Volunteering

Maggie Beer's BIG MISSION

Meaningful Activities

Tool 2 Chore Ideas

Involving older adults in meaningful roles has many benefits - older adults enjoy feeling productive, and it saves others' time. Match the chore with the older adult's interests and abilities, and consult a health care professional for safety considerations.

Outdoors / Gardening	Meal Service (consider Food Safety & Infection)	Meaningful Activities
Garden maintenance	Setting the dining room	Preparing for activities
Sweeping paths	Folding serviettes	Setting up / packing up the activity e.g. bingo
Raking	Setting the dining tables	Collecting people for an activity
Emptying rubbish bins	Arranging flowers in vases	Restocking activity stations, rotating
Organising the gardening supplies	Putting out condiments	Checking task boxes to ensure all items are there and in good repair
Helping to assemble outdoor furniture	Writing the menu boards	Updating the interactive walls, rotating content
Repairing	Displaying the labels on the buffet	Delivering the activity program, putting on notice boards
Positioning furniture neatly	Ironing serviettes and/or tablecloths	Setting up for resident birthdays e.g. writing card, balloons, signs on their door, leading singing of Happy Birthday
Looking after the fountain - cleaning, topping up	Serving	Matching CDs and DVDs to their covers
Managing a worm farm	Ringing a bell to indicate it is time for lunch or dinner	Rotating the CDs / DVDs between houses
Managing a compost bin	Sanitising hands	Supporting volunteers
Taking care of animals e.g. chickens, guinea pigs	Managing flow of the buffet	
Cleaning bird cage	Making tea & coffee	Running activities
Winding umbrellas up / down	Serving food or drinks	Helping with the activity e.g. calling bingo numbers, reading the newspaper, putting scores on whiteboard, doing nails, etc
	Pushing the drink or dessert trolley	Sharing a skill e.g. running an art class, playing piano, teaching wood work

Gardening	Taking trays to people dining in their rooms / collecting them	Running footy tipping competition
Selecting plants	Filling water jugs, delivering to people's rooms	Playing an instrument
Going to buy gardening supplies		Helping with happy hour drinks trolley
Rearing young plants	Cleaning	Looking after pets
Planting and repotting	Clearing tables	Managing the library
Watering plants	Collecting trays from people's rooms	Hand massages
Fertilising	Scraping plates	Visiting residents who are isolated e.g. reading to them, playing music, singing
Pruning / hedge trimming	Wiping trays	Knitting / crocheting / sewing for others e.g. knee rugs, fabric serviettes, fiddle cushions
Harvesting	Packing up the buffet	
Picking flowers	Stocking condiments – sugar, salt, pepper, jams, etc	Evaluating activities
Picking fruit, clearing dropped fruit	Washing, drying, putting away dishes	Giving feedback about the activities
Weeding	Polishing cutlery	Taking part in resident committee (choosing bus outings / movies / entertainers, reviewing program)
Topping up watering cans	Wiping benches and cupboard fronts	Taking photos of the activities
Watering indoor plants	Sweeping the dining room floor	Thanking guest speakers or entertainers
	Cleaning and organising cupboards	Writing newsletter articles about the activities
Cleaning		Presenting a report on the activities at the R&R meeting
Cleaning outdoor furniture	Food related tasks	
Cleaning cobwebs	Buttering bread	
Cleaning the BBQ	Making toast	
Cleaning the pavers e.g. hosing the courtyard & scrubbing	Peeling / grating vegetables	
Cleaning wheelchairs / frames	Making coleslaw, fruit salad	
Cleaning windows	Making sandwiches	
	Simple cooking e.g. bread maker, soups, icing cakes	
Assisting others to enjoy the garden		
Stocking up sunscreen dispenser	Fostering interactions	
Opening / closing blinds to outside	Welcoming people as they enter	
Locking / unlocking door to outside	Sitting with new residents	
Escorting residents into the garden	Cleaning people's glasses	
Taking residents on a wheelchair walk	Playing music before / after meal	
Running a gardening club	Asking for feedback about the meal	
Sharing knowledge about gardening	Sharing feedback with the Chef	
Sharing an outdoor hobby e.g. bird watching	Being part of a mealtime committee	
Writing gardening articles for the newsletter		