

For assisted living residents with dementia, quality of life improves with personalized, mindful care

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Assisted living communities can improve the quality of life for residents with dementia by approaching them as individuals and attempting to include all residents in activities, according to a study led by a Georgia State University gerontology researcher.

The typical "activity programming" at many assisted living residences can leave people with dementia on the sidelines, according to the study, "Meaningful Engagement Among Assisted Living Residents With Dementia: Successful Approaches," published in the *Journal of Applied Gerontology*.

The study found that the keys to improving quality of life for residents with dementia are getting to know them as individuals, meeting people "where they are," being in the moment with people and viewing all interactions with residents as opportunities to connect.

The study, based on interviews and observational

visits conducted in 2019, offers initial findings as part of a five-year project being funded by the National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health.

"COVID-19 highlights the importance of meaningful engagement for everyone, especially for persons living with dementia," said Candace Kemp, a professor at Georgia State University's Gerontology Institute and principle investigator of the study. "Doing things that are enjoyable and being engaged to the extent possible and desirable are significant for [quality of life](#) and quality of care."

Researchers conducted interviews and observations involving 33 assisted living residents with varying types of dementia and levels of functional ability. They represent a diversity of gender, age, race and ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The researchers found that actively "listening and observing verbal and non-verbal cues were keys to connecting and meeting residents on their own terms." The researchers urged caregivers to try to include all residents in activities and not to assume that people with [dementia](#) can't benefit from activities simply because they may not be able to respond in the same way as other residents.

The research has implications in the COVID-19 era, which has limited visits by family and friends at many assisted living facilities and restricted group activities and gathering for meals. A greater focus on meaningful engagement with residents "holds promise for offsetting the [negative effects](#) of social distancing for residents and for reducing care partner strain," the researchers wrote.

Co-authors include researchers from Georgia State's Gerontology Institute and Emory University.

The ongoing project, "Meaningful Engagement and Quality of Life among Assisted Living Residents with Dementia," includes researchers from Georgia State and Emory University working with residents and their care partners in assisted-living communities and personal-care homes in and around Atlanta.

More information: Candace L. Kemp et al. Meaningful Engagement Among Assisted Living Residents With Dementia: Successful Approaches, *Journal of Applied Gerontology* (2021). DOI: [10.1177/0733464821996866](https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464821996866)

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