

Family Newsletter



Rocking Chair Therapy and Dementia:

Promoting Emotional and Physical Balance

By Ava M. Stinnett

What draws us to a rocking chair? Whether it's seeing an empty glider on a comfy front porch or a rocker in a child's nursery, there's an almost audible calling to sit and enjoy the comforting back-and-forth motion. Perhaps it hails from our original development in the womb where the rhythm of our mother's movements stimulated blood flow and a sense of calm, much like the sensory stimuli attached to gentle waves against a boat.

We know that a rocking chair can soothe a fussy baby, but how might using a rocking chair benefit those who have dementia? Two studies from the University of Rochester School of Nursing found that the repetitive action of using a rocking chair helped ease tension and behavioral disorders, improve balance and muscle tone, and reduce the need for pain medication. In the studies, nursing home residents diagnosed with dementia due to Alzheimer's or other causes rocked for half an hour to two and a half hours each day for five days a week. Although not all residents showed improvement in psychological and emotional well-being, those who rocked the most improved the most through the manageable, non-weight-bearing exercise of mild rocking. Nancy M. Watson, PhD, RN, who conducted the studies, said that "a gentle repetitive motion has a soothing effect... and seniors could literally rock away their anxiety and depression. The patients required less medication and their balance improved as well. Further benefits included a happier nursing home staff. And families of rocking seniors were happier because their loved ones were happier."

THAT YOU REMEMBER ME

I've learned so much
throughout my life
but there's much I don't recall.
I know it's in there somewhere
but it's hard to find it all.
It's not that I've forgotten you,
or the things I said I'd do;
I remember everything
but it's hidden
somewhere I can't see
just beyond my view.

You see, there is a shadow where
there didn't used to be,
and sometimes
when I look right there
it just confuses me.

I remember lovely flowers,
and songs I used to sing.
I remember springtime showers,
and rainbows they would bring.
I remember movies
and who would be the star,
but sometimes it's so hard for me
to know just who you are.

I love to watch a baseball game
or listen to the birds.
I love to tell you secrets.
I love to hear your words.
I love for you to sit with me;
perhaps you'll hold my hand
and tell me that you love me:
that I'll understand.

My mind has ways of taking me
where I don't want to go.
I know I know your name,
you see;
just right now it's hard for me
to think of things I really know,
and to know what really is
and what may not be so.

Though I might forget you,
it's important that you see
just how much it means to me
that you remember me.

Daniel Mark Extrom

©Daniel Mark Extrom
2009-2014. All rights reserved.



One of the reasons for a reduction in pain could be that the gentle exercise of rocking may release endorphins and improve mood. Further, it is believed that the spinal cord can work only in one direction at a time, so when the brain is sending motor impulses down the spinal cord to make the legs rock the chair, pain impulses from the back are blocked and prevented from reaching the brain. Then, muscles in the lower back relax. Orthopedic surgeons often recommend rocking to improve strength and flexibility in the knees and hips.

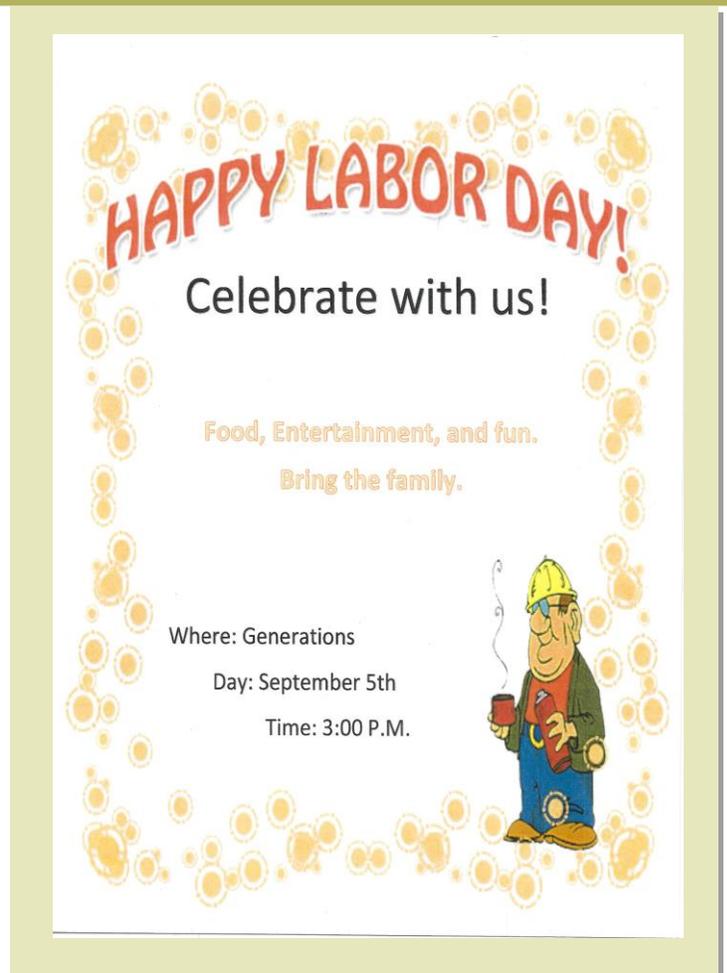
Whether it's a traditional rocker or a glider, you'll want to use a chair that has a solid foundation and a comfortable seat. To maintain or improve physiological relaxation, use a chair that allows the senior's feet to comfortably reach the floor. Watch carefully to see whether they can easily sit down in and rise up from the chair—with or without help. You may want to gauge the amount of time spent in the chair, slowly increasing the time spent rocking based on beneficial secondary results such as reduced agitation, better sleep, and better pain management.

Sources

Rocking Chair Therapy Research.
Retrieved from
<http://www.rockingchairtherapy.org/research.html>.

Houston, K. (1993). An investigation of rocking as relaxation for the elderly. *Geriatric Nursing*, 14, 186–189.

Watson, N. M., Wells, T. J., and Cox, C. (1998). Rocking chair therapy for dementia patients: Its effect on psychosocial well-being and balance. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias*, 13(6), 293–308.



Dementia Behaviors: Repetitive Phone Calling

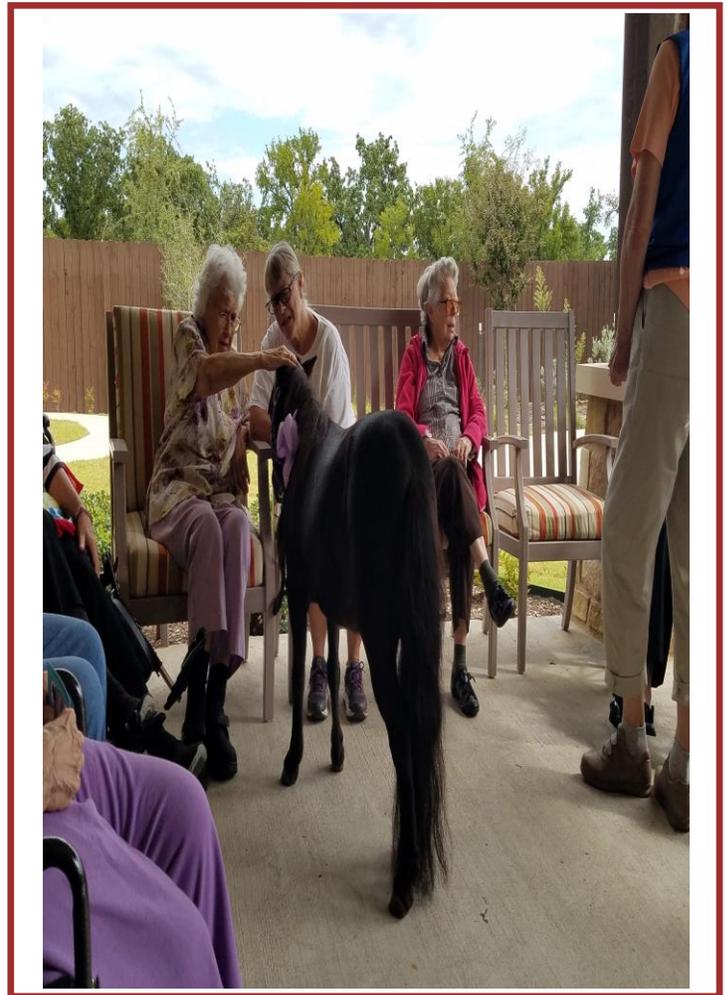
By Ava M. Stinnett

Whether your loved one has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or another type of dementia, it's important to know that confusion, memory loss, and difficulty performing everyday activities are common overlapping symptoms. A healthcare provider may use a simple three-phase model (mild/early, moderate/middle, and severe/late) to describe the progression of the disease. Although symptoms will vary for each person, learning more about how dementia unfolds over several years can guide you as you plan for a loved one's care.

In the mild to moderate stage, symptoms may include loss of awareness of recent events, personality changes, confusion about surroundings, and repetition of particular actions or behaviors. For example, some people with dementia make phone calls to their loved ones over and over again—particularly in the middle of the night or early morning. This might occur because they forget that they have already called; it's also possible that they're feeling insecure, anxious, or even bored and need to be occupied. Still others with dementia call just to make sure someone answers the phone. Medical professionals sometimes call this act of going through the motions of familiar activities “perseveration” (Rosenzweig, 2017).

As a loved one on the receiving end of the phone calls, it can be frustrating or distressing—even more so when your elder calls your neighbors, other relatives, or even physicians when they don't reach you after several unanswered calls. Additionally, the expense of long distance calls or overage of mobile phone minutes can become problematic. What steps can you take to alleviate this behavior?

First, talk with your loved one's healthcare provider to determine whether medication needs to be adjusted or if another type of treatment for dementia is warranted. It might help to get a phone with a number recognition display so that you, other family members, and friends can decide whether or not to answer. Switching ringers off at night is another option. While you may feel guilty about not answering every call, it's important to try to stop the repetitive calling—for you and for your loved one. Another option, depending on how far the disease has



has progressed, is to purchase a telephone that has no dial or buttons to place calls; the phone is for incoming calls only. In that case, however, you must first assess the situation to ensure that safety options are available in case of emergency.

If you can, create a pleasant diversion such as taking a walk, looking through a photo album, sorting and folding clothes, or listening to soothing music. Try to redirect by changing the focus from anxious behavior to a favorite pastime such as sanding wood, gardening, or providing a safe environment for cooking or baking.

Once you can identify the emotion associated with the behavior (e.g., fear, anxiety, boredom, anger, loneliness), you can react to it instead of to the question or behavior. Taking time to express words of reassurance, understanding, and caring can do wonders to ease the challenges of being a caregiver.

Sources

Rosenzweig, A. (2017, May 26). Perseveration in Alzheimer's and Other Dementia: Getting Stuck. Retrieved from

<https://www.verywell.com/perseveration-98602>

The Alzheimer's Association. (2017). Repetition and Alzheimer's. Retrieved from

<http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-repetition.asp>

The Care Support Services. (2012, January 8).

Repetitive behaviors and the frustration they present to the dementia caregiver. Retrieved

from <http://thecaresupport.com/repetitive-behaviors-and-the-frustration-they-present-to-the-dementia-caregiver>

Caring for Someone Else

In most cases, the primary caregiver of someone with Alzheimer's disease will be a loved one, a spouse, adult child, or close companion. Even in the early stages of the disease, caregiving is an extremely demanding, 24-hour-a-day task. Caregivers need to be flexible and understanding in dealing with changes in their loved one's behavior and personality. They must also be able to communicate with family, friends and professionals about his or her condition.

Spouses who are caregivers are likely to be strongly affected by a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, as they process the profound changes their future holds:

Spouses often have their own health problems.

- Husbands and wives often must reverse roles and take on unfamiliar tasks.

- Depending on a couple's relationship, Alzheimer's can bring them closer together or it can alienate them.

- Spouses must accept that the person they have known and loved may change dramatically in personality and behavior, and there will

September Birthdays

In astrology, those born from September 1–22 are Virgos. Detail-oriented Virgos have a deep sense of humanity, a trait that makes them careful, tender, and practical. Since all that attention to detail is put into the service of others, Virgos make perfect humanitarians. Those born between September 23–30 balance the scales of Libra. Libra epitomizes fairness and harmony in all dealings large and small. Sincere, beautiful, and romantic, Libra will work hard to keep all relationships on an even keel with boundless grace and charm.

Jack Barry: 09/11/1929

Marian McCoig: 09/02/2016

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO OUR WONDERFUL GEMS!!

almost without a doubt come a time when their loved one does not recognize them.

Adult children who are caregivers also need to adjust to the role reversal in caring for their parent. They may feel overwhelmed by the other responsibilities in their lives such as working within or outside the home and caring for their children.

As distressing as an Alzheimer's diagnosis can be, this is the time to begin to accept the future, build a support network, gather information to help alleviate fears and plan for the road ahead. Family members who do not live nearby should support the main caregiver and try to help with tasks that they can do where they are.