

So how do you like to have fun BY YOURSELF?

What types of activities, places, experiences, sensations, times of day, spaces, and lengths of time work best for you to really enjoy yourself without anyone else around or involved?

For some of us, these type of activities may be quiet, passive, and simple; while for others they may be incredibly demanding, extremely complicated, or intensely intricate. The one thing they will all have in common, is that when we are doing them *just right* and we find our flow or get in our zone, they transform us in some way. We are fulfilled and enhanced in a special and remarkable way. Being able to continue to experience such moments of ecstasy or nirvana, provides a person with a potent defense against boredom, disengagement, and purposelessness.

So how can we support a person's solitary activities when their brain is changing in its ability to command all functions and run the show on its own? It will require flexibility, creativity, and a willingness to **fail** multiple times before the *just right* combination of modification and consistency is achieved, and it will not necessarily last for that long. All involved will be attempting to find a new magic that speaks to the spirit preferences of the person so that there are still opportunities for meaningful and valuable solitude.

If there are safety concerns about the individual's skill sets compared to the demands of the solo pleasure, is there a way to use technology either for monitoring and tracking, or for a more automated safety support system? There are more options available than ever before. None are risk-free, yet many can provide a back-up alternative that might allow both parties to still feel a little more in control while acknowledging the person living with dementia's need for autonomy. Some systems that can track or provide audio or video monitoring can foster a sense of independence and isolation while providing a back-up system that meets the needs or wants of the surrogate decision makers or authority figures that have the power to halt the pursuit of the activity. Fear or concern on the part of authorized decision-makers or people in positions of control and leadership can halt participation, based, not on actual performance, but rather their own beliefs or history with dementia. The world of automated back-up mechanisms is changing weekly. There are now devices that can cut off power, tighten or secure a harness, or lock down a machine or cutting device without injury to the person. Devices such as automatic belay systems for climbers, automatic electric stove cut-off switches that are synched to smoke alarms or set on timers, table saws that cannot damage fingers with the use of a device called the SawStop, and even self-driving cars. If technology is not the answer or available, for some people and some pleasures, having an expert who is simply present and available without interacting can provide enough risk reduction without limiting pleasure. For others,

taking along a quiet and trusted friend can offer sustained opportunities that are different, yet may still hold pleasure.

If the challenge is more related to the change in pre-frontal skill areas:

- being logical, reasonable, and rational in thinking
- controlling impulsive actions or reactions
- making decisions that are based on values and life-long preferences
- initiating - accurately sequencing – terminating - then transitioning
- being accurate in self-awareness of competence or need for assistance
- ability to attend to the perceptions and needs of others

Then it is highly likely that something about the task, the setting, the timing of the activity, and the skills of support personnel will be required in order for the person to continue to engage in the pleasure. So the question may now be, what portion of the activity is really pleasure inducing? Is that changing at all? Is it possible that something completely different might provide a NEW opportunity, rather than trying to use something from the past that is no longer satisfying or may actually cause so much pain and distress that a major shift is in order.

Exploring the unfamiliar can be a little frightening. Having another person precede you in attempting something and surviving it, while not mastering it, can offer many people the key for trying out a new experience. This can be true whether it is painting a section of a mural, singing a song, dancing, bowling, working with clay, casting a line, hiking a trail, riding a horse, feeding puppies, making jewelry, gem hunting, watching birds, assuming a yoga position, or riding on a merry-go-round. It isn't always what you DO, or SAY, or HEAR, or SEE, it is how you FEEL when it happens. That is the pleasure.

It is certainly possible that solo pleasures can and do occur within the intimate space within the person long after we can perceive it from without. So perhaps, at times we should be more alert and aware of signals and signs that may indicate my solo pleasure finding is alive and well deep within me. A smile, a head turn, closed eyes with a peaceful face, humming, tapping, rocking, swaying, breathing, and so many more possibilities exist. We may want more for our person, and yet we may be missing what our person has in the moment.

Here are a few articles that have looked at pleasure and people living with dementia.

Jiska Cohen-Mansfield, et al. [What affects pleasure in persons with advanced stage dementia?](#)

Angus McPherson [Paintings bring pleasure for patients with dementia says study](#)

[The Dementia Friendly Swimming Hub: Improving swimming for people living with dementia](#)