

Fun in the sun Outdoor activities for aged care residents

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As spring approaches, seniors living in aged care should be encouraged to enjoy the warmer weather and reap the health benefits of some time spent outdoors.



After the winter months cooped up inside, many aged care residents look forward to getting out into the fresh air. So as the warm weather slowly starts to return, the prospect of spring can create feelings of anticipation and joy for everyone.

Staying active and enjoying the outdoors is particularly important for the elderly so finding activities that are suitable to their abilities is essential.

Some favourite spring activities often enjoyed include walking, picnicking, and working in the garden. Of course, aged care residents range from the more adventurous who might enjoy swimming to those who just love the atmosphere outdoors and want to sit somewhere and simply drink in the fresh air.

It all gives joy and adds meaning to our lives.

The value of going outdoors

As warmer weather returns, it is important to realise how truly beneficial getting outdoors can be for the elderly. So spring is a great opportunity to add some new activities to their routine. Carers can tempt residents outside with interesting ideas to stay physically and mentally active.

Getting outside and into the sunshine exposes our bodies to the essential Vitamin D. This vitamin is crucial for strong bones, healthy muscles and improved mood. Daylight is also important for regulating our body's clock, helping to promote a healthy sleeping schedule.

Research has shown that people with dementia who undertake between 10 and 15 minutes of activity outside a day improved their health significantly. For the elderly with mobility issues, simply sitting outside for a short period of time can have positive mental and physical health benefits. It is important to monitor the position and make sure the residents are wearing protective clothing, sunscreen and drinking plenty of water when exposed to the sun.

Planning outdoor activities

Elderly people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia may find outdoor tasks difficult or feel overwhelmed by a change in their preferred routine. However, with the help and reassurance from professional carers or family members, simple and enjoyable outdoor activities can still be incorporated into their care plan.

Activities can be planned to occur around the same time each day. They can be designed to coincide with the times when the person with dementia may be most often active. They can be encouraged to play a part of the activity or simply made comfortable in a spot where they can observe others.

Here are a few other things to consider when planning outdoor activities:

- Keep activities in line with the residents' physical and mental capabilities
- Reassure residents about the experience
- Inspire the residents about the benefits
- Ensure residents also rest and hydrate

Keeping it local makes it easier

Aged care residents do not need to be overly active to enjoy the mental and physical health benefits of spending time outdoors.

The outdoor activities will need to be suitable for residents who have a wide range of limitations. So, for some residents, simply spending time sitting in the dappled shade or on the verandah can be enough. Other outings can be planned to meet the abilities of the more active seniors, from a walk around a park, or a visit to a swimming pool, the zoo or the botanical gardens.

When choosing an outdoor activity consider the hobbies and interests the residents used to enjoy. Often the pleasure and relaxation they felt doing these activities in the past will return.

A sporting event might be overwhelming for some seniors but attending a home-grown social game might be a great way to spend an afternoon. There is the same action and excitement, but with less noise and confusion.

Taking advantage of the local area by walking around the block or wandering around window shopping can be a great way for seniors to get some light exercise outdoors. For residents in wheelchair a trip around the aged care residence can be adventure enough.

Many times, simply deviating from the usual routine and getting a breath of fresh air outdoors will lift the mood of aged care residents. Creating a variety of activities that are realistic and enjoyable can generate a great deal of happiness.

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