



Holistic Wellness Strategies for Residents Living with Dementia

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Objectives

- Understand a holistic care environment by hearing how physical, emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual, and sensory factors interact in the lived experience of dementia.
- Learn core guiding principles, such as person-centered care, respect for autonomy, strengths-based support, and relationship-focused communication.
- Create a holistic environment by shaping personal spaces, routines, assessing abilities, and life history to promote safety, familiarity, and meaningful engagement.
- Identify practical tools and implementation methods to ensure consistency and quality across caregivers and settings.

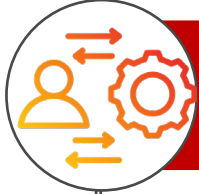




Why do people struggle with dementia care programming?



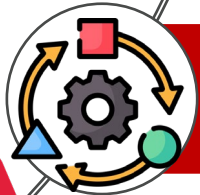
Engagement



Approach



Design



Okay with adaptation and change



What is Holistic Care?

- Supports the WHOLE person
- Views each person as a blend of physical, emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual, and environmental needs
- Why is holistic care important?
 - Improves quality of life by addressing the full range of needs
 - Reduces distress and enhances comfort
 - Strengthens relationships
 - Leads to more personalized care



Guiding Principles of Holistic Wellness

- **Person-Centered:** built around life-history, preferences, and remaining strengths
- **Predictable but Flexible:** routines reduce anxiety, but options allow autonomy
- **Sensory-Aware:** programs should match each resident's sensory tolerance
- **Success-Oriented:** tasks should be achievable and affirming
- **Small-Group/1:1 Friendly:** many residents benefit from quieter, more intimate formats



How We Look at Those with Dementia

- It MATTERS!
 - It's not all about loss
 - It's not “untreatable”
 - It not “unpredictable”
 - Behaviors don't come out of nowhere
 - Dementia doesn't just affect the person with the disease: it impacts all of us



Living Gems – Teepa Snow



Sapphire ~ True Blue ~ Optimal Cognition, Healthy Brain

True to self: personal preferences remain basically the same
Can be flexible in thinking and appreciate multiple perspectives
Stress/pain/fatigue may trigger Diamond state: back to Sapphire with relief
Able to suppress and filter personal reactions: chooses effective responses
Selects from options and can make informed decisions
Processes well and able to successfully transition
Aging doesn't change ability: processing slows, more effort/time/practice needed



Diamond ~ Clear and Sharp ~ Routines and Rituals Rule

Displays many facets: behavior and perspective can shift dramatically
Prefers the familiar and may resist change: challenged by transitions
More rigid and self-focused; sees wants as needs, when stressed
Personal likes/dislikes in relationships/space/belongings etc, become more intense
Reacts to changes in environment; benefits from familiar; functional/forgiving
Needs repetition and time to absorb new/different information or routines
Trusted authority figures can help: reacts better when respect is mutual



Emerald ~ Green and On the Go With a Purpose ~ Naturally Flawed

Sees self as able and independent, with limited awareness of changes in ability
Lives in moments of clarity mixed with periods of loss in logic/reason/perspective
Understanding and use of language change: vague words and many repeats
Cues and support help when getting to/from places and doing daily routines
Awareness of time, place, and situation will not always match current reality
Strong emotional reactions are triggered by fears, desires, or unmet needs
Needs to know what comes next: seeks guidance and assistance to fill the day



Amber ~ Caught in a Moment of Time ~ Caution Required

Focused on sensation: seeks to satisfy desires and tries to avoid what is disliked
Environment can drive actions and reactions without awareness of safety
Visual abilities are limited: focus is on pieces or parts, not the whole picture
What happens to or around an Amber, may cause strong and surprising reactions
Enters others' space and crosses boundaries attempting to meet own needs
Has periods of intense activity: may be very curious or repetitive with objects or actions
Care is refused or seen as threatening, due to differences in perspective and ability



Ruby ~ Deep and Strong in Color ~ Others Stop Seeing What is Possible

Makes use of rhythm: can usually sing, hum, pray, sway, rock, clap, and dance
When moving can't stop; when stopped can't get moving: needs guidance and help
Big, strong movements are possible, while skilled abilities are being lost
Danger exists due to limited abilities combined with automatic actions or reactions
Tends to miss subtle hints, but gets magnified facial expressions and voice rhythms
Can mimic actions or motions, but will struggle to understand instructions/gestures
Able to pick up and hold objects, and yet not know what to do with them



Pearl ~ Hidden Within a Shell ~ Beautiful Moments to Behold

Will frequently recognize familiar touches, voices, faces, aromas, and tastes
Personhood survives, although all other capabilities are minimal
Understanding input takes time: go slow and simplify for success
In care, first get connected by offering comfort then use careful and caring touch
Changes in the body are profound: weight loss, immobility, systems are failing
As protective reflexes are lost, breathing, swallowing, and moving will be difficult
Care partners benefit from learning the art of letting go rather than simply giving up



• <https://teepasnow.com/about/about-teepa-snow/the-gems-brain-change-model/>

Why Stage

- Residents experience different challenges during different stages
- Predicts characteristics
 - Cognition
 - Communication
 - Mood/behavior
 - Functional ability
- Allows for common language and approach to provide “just-right” care:
 - Environmental support
 - Caregiver support and cueing strategies
 - Expectations for retained abilities and lost skills
 - Promotes graded task modification
- Tracks disease progression
- Helps when developing programs and grouping residents together



Different Types of Staging Tools

- Global Deterioration Scale (GD)
- American Alzheimer's Association
- Center for Applied Research in Dementia- Montessori Approach to Dementia Care
- Cognitive Disabilities Model- Claudia Allen
- Theory of Retrogenesis- Barry Reisberg, MD
- Person-Centered Care Approach Thomas Kitwood, PhD
- GEMS® –Teepa Snow, OTR



Dementia Through a Holistic Lens

- Symptoms and Progression of Dementia
- Shifting from a deficit model to a strengths-based model
 - Focusing on abilities, preferences, and identity
- The role of environment and relationships



Physical Wellness Strategies

- **Goals:** mobility, comfort, energy regulation, fall prevention
- **Tips:** Keep sessions short (10-20 minutes) and incorporate rhythm or music to cue movement
- **Movement and exercise** — walking groups, chair exercises, stretching, or dancing to music help maintain mobility and reduce agitation.
- **Nutrition and hydration support** — offering finger foods, adaptive utensils, and calm dining environments can make eating easier.
- **Sleep hygiene** — consistent routines, natural light exposure, and reduced evening stimulation support healthier sleep patterns.
- **Comfort-focused care** — attention to pain, posture, skin integrity, and sensory needs helps reduce behavioral expressions linked to discomfort.




Physical Wellness Strategies

- Examples:
 - Chair yoga or tai chi
 - Guided stretching or range-of-motion sessions
 - Walking clubs (indoors or outdoors)
 - Dance-based movement (slow tempo, familiar music)
 - Balloon volleyball or soft-ball toss
 - Gardening or raised-bed plant care









Seated Exercise Class with Music



The GEMS State Model

Positive Approach to Care

The Positive Approach to Care GEMS® State Model was created to help us see the retained abilities of a person living with dementia (PLWD). An individual's GEMS state indicates retained skill in combination with missing function, so that support and cueing will foster engagement and participation rather than isolation and dysfunction. In dementia, there are not static stages or levels of lost abilities. A PLWD will experience a variety of GEMS states throughout each day and over time. Recognizing the GEMS state allows us to engage in an appropriate manner and helps the PLWD shine, just as they are in that moment.

 <p>Sapphire True blue Healthy brain Normal aging Flexible Adaptable Optimal cognition Can provide support for other GEMS states with proper self-care and support Less peripheral awareness with age</p>	 <p>Diamond Clear – Sharp Many facets Lives by habit and routine Likes familiar, dislikes change Blames or dismisses errors Can cut and shine Scuba vision</p>	 <p>Emerald Green On the go with purpose Flawed Seeks independence or connections Repeats Misses details Travels in time and place Binocular vision</p>	 <p>Amber Orange Caught in a moment of time More curious than cautious Focused on sensory needs Lives in the moment Copies actions, not tasks Resists dislikes, seeks likes Can confuse objects</p>	 <p>Ruby Strong red Retains strength, not skills Big/strong actions Has rhythm Notices tone of voice In motion or still Imitates actions Monocular vision</p>	 <p>Pearl Hidden in a shell Ruled by reflexes Short moments of connection Mostly immobile Expresses unmet needs with distress Reacts to touch Can recognize familiar and liked Limited visual regard</p>
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• <https://teepasnow.com/about/about-teepa-snow/the-gems-brain-change-model/>

Emotional and Psychological Wellness

- **Goals:** Expression, identity, emotional regulation
- **Tips:** creative activities often unlock memories and reduce agitation
- Validation and Emotional Attunement



Emotional and Psychological Strategies

- **Program Ideas:**

- Music therapy or sing-alongs with familiar songs
- Art sessions (watercolor, collage, clay, finger painting)
- Poetry reading or fill-in-the-blank poetry
- Life story scrapbooking
- Pet therapy or robotic companion animals
- Guided relaxation or breathing exercises



Social Wellness and Connection

- **Goals:** Belonging, communication, relationship building
- **Tips:** Keep groups small to avoid overstimulation
- **Small-group activities**
- **Intergenerational programs**



Social Wellness and Connection

- **Family involvement** — encouraging families to share stories, photos, and traditions strengthens identity and belonging.
- **Peer relationships** — residents often benefit from simply sitting together, sharing meals, or listening to music as a group.
 - Coffee socials or afternoon tea
 - Intergenerational visits (schools, youth groups)
 - Small-group games (bingo, trivia, picture-based games)
 - Birthday and milestone celebrations
 - Family-resident craft nights
 - “Men’s group” or “Women’s circle” for identity-based connection



Cognitive Wellness

- **Goals:** cognitive stimulation, orientation, sense of purpose
- **Tips:** Focus on *process*, not accuracy – engagement is the outcome
- Supporting cognitive health means creating opportunities for engagement without overwhelming the resident.
- Environmental Supports



Cognitive Wellness

- **Meaningful activities** — puzzles, sorting tasks, reminiscence conversations, music recognition, or familiar household tasks that stimulate thinking.
- **Routine and predictability** — consistent schedules reduce anxiety and support orientation.
- **Sensory cues** — labeled drawers, contrasting colors, memory boxes, and personalized room décor help with navigation and recall.
- **Reminiscence therapy** — photos, music, scents, and objects from earlier life stages can spark positive memories and emotional grounding.



Spiritual Wellness

- **Goals:** peace, identity, connection to values
- **Tips:** Spirituality is broader than religion – includes nature, meaning, purpose, inner peace, and legacy



Spiritual Wellness

- **Life story work** — capturing personal histories helps staff tailor care and gives residents a sense of continuity.
- **Rituals and routines** — prayer, meditation, blessings before meals, or quiet reflection time can be grounding.
- **Nature-based experiences** — gardens, sunlight, fresh air, and interaction with plants or animals support calm and connection.
- **Acts of contribution** — folding towels, watering plants, or helping set tables fosters purpose and dignity.



Sensory Wellness

- **Goals:** Comfort, grounding, reduce anxiety
- **Tips:** Sensory programming is especially effective for residents in later stages





Sensory Wellness

- **Program Ideas:**

- Aromatherapy (lavender, citrus, peppermint—use gently)
- Hand massages or lotion rituals
- Weighted blankets or lap pads
- Nature soundscapes
- Sensory rooms with soft lighting and tactile objects
- Outdoor sensory walks (wind, sun, textures, smells)



Environmental Wellness

- **Goals:** Comfort, orientation, reduce distress
- **Tips:** The environment *is* part of the wellness program
- The environment can either support or hinder well-being for residents with dementia.





Environmental Wellness

- **Home-like spaces** — warm colors, familiar furniture, and personal items reduce anxiety.
- **Clear pathways** — uncluttered spaces support safe mobility.
- **Sensory-friendly design** — soothing scents, soft textures, and natural light promote comfort.
- **Safe wandering areas** — secure outdoor or indoor walking paths allow freedom of movement without risk.



Creating a Holistic Care Environment



Creating a Holistic Care Environment

- Holistic care works best when it's woven into everyday routines rather than added as extra tasks.
- Designing supportive spaces
- **Personalized care plans** — built around each resident's history, preferences, and strengths.
- **Consistent staffing** — familiar caregivers reduce confusion and build trust
 - Staff training and culture
 - Consistency and collaboration
- **Observation and adaptation** — noticing changes in mood, behavior, or comfort helps staff adjust approaches.
- **Team collaboration** — nursing, activities, dietary, therapy, and family members all contribute to wellness.



Know the Resident's Life Story!



- Family: past and present
- Living place(s)
- Work history
- Leisure history
- Music history
- People history
- Plant history
- Animal history
- Plant history
- Sensory environment preferences
- Cultural history and concerns
- Food likes and dislikes
- Daily routines
- Organizations and memberships
- Roles and responsibilities
- Comforts and irritants



Benefits of a Holistic Approach

- A holistic wellness model can lead to:
 - Reduced agitation and anxiety
 - Improved mood and engagement
 - Stronger relationships between residents and caregivers
 - Enhanced sense of identity and purpose
 - Greater overall quality of life
 - Falls management



Practical Tools and Takeaways

- Checklist for holistic wellness planning
 - Calendar and offerings analysis
- Daily rhythm templates (examples to come!)
- Ideas for low-cost, high-impact activities
- How to individualize care plans
- How to make this work within YOUR community?



Holistic Wellness Program Checklist for Seniors With Dementia

Fillable checklist form — click checkboxes or type into note fields.

1. Physical Wellness

- Seated or standing exercises
- Balance & fall-prevention activities
- Walks (indoor/outdoor)
- Range-of-motion stretching
- Adaptive movement options (wheelchair-friendly)
- Hydration schedule implemented
- Meals aligned with swallowing ability
- High-nutrition snacks available
- Weight checks completed
- Input/output monitoring (if applicable)
- Medication schedule followed
- Pain assessment performed
- Skin integrity checked
- Toileting schedule maintained
- Sleep environment optimized

2. Cognitive Wellness

- Reminiscence activities (photos, memories, music)
- Sorting/folding familiar tasks
- Simple puzzles or matching activities
- Conversation prompts used
- Music therapy sessions
- Sensory stimulation provided
- Visual cues in place (clocks/calendars)
- Routine consistency maintained
- Gentle redirection techniques used
- Familiar objects accessible

3. Social & Emotional Wellness

- One-on-one engagement provided
- Participation in small group activities
- Family connections supported

Practical Tools and Takeaways

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Social Physical Emotional Environmental Intellectual Vocational Spiritual			1 Finish the Phrase Resident Council Bingo	2 Coffee Circle Reminiscing Relaxing Outdoors Catholic Mass	3 Music Manicures Wheel of Fortune	4 Hilarious History Country Music on TV Penny Ante
5 Refreshments Chit Chat Church Service	6 Exercise Group Trivia Dance Music on TV What's in the Bag?	7 Bible Study Relaxing Outdoors Play Me a Tune	8 Trivia Music Request Lunch Outings Bingo	9 Coffee Circle Reminiscing Music Performances Family Fun Night	10 Music Manicures Relaxing Outdoors	11 Coffee Circle History Oldies Rock on TV Spiral Sun Catchers
12 Refreshments Discussion Group Church Service	13 Exercise Group Performance Music Videos Making Chia Pets	14 Kickball Relaxing Outdoors Rootbeer Floats	15 Sandwich Game Refreshments Men's Fishing Trip Bingo	16 Coffee Circle Reminiscing Catholic Mass	17 Music Manicures	18 Coffee Circle Haphazard History Oldies Music on TV Wheel of Fortune
19 Dad Jokes & Discussion Church Service	20 Exercise Group Trivia Karaoke	21 Bible Study Music Relaxing Outdoors Ice Cream	22 Refreshments Lunch Outing	23 Coffee Circle Reminiscing Relaxing Outdoors Play Me a Tune Catholic Mass	24 Music Manicures Good Old Country Music on TV Bingo	35 Coffee Circle History Country Music on TV
26 Refreshments Finish the Song Church Service	27 Voting Trivia Music on the TV	28 Memorial Service Cookies and Coffee Relaxing Outdoors Watermelon	29 Good Old Day Stories Refreshments Women's Fishing Trip Bingo	30 Coffee Circle Reminiscing Relaxing Outdoors Play Me a Tune Pizza Party		



Sample Daily Rhythm Template

Morning

- 7:30 – 8:30 – Wake up, Breakfast
- 8:30 – 9:00 – Daily orientation (date, weather, gentle conversation)
- 9:00 – 10:00 – Physical activity (walk, tai chi, balance)
- 10:00 – 10:15 – Hydration + snack
- 10:15 – 11:30 – Cognitive engagement (word games, music therapy, cooking/baking, art)

Mid – Day

- 12:00 – 1:00 – Lunch
- 1:00 – 1:30 – Social time (calls with family, group chat)
- 1:30 – 2:30 – Rest/nap/quiet time (essential for cognitive reset)

Afternoon

- 2:30 – 3:00 – Hydration + snack
- 3:00 – 4:00 – Outdoor time (garden, bird feeders, patio sitting)
- 4:00 – 5:00 – Purposeful activity (organizing drawers, folding clothes, watering plants)

Evening

- 5:00 – 6:00 – Dinner
- 6:00 – 7:00 – Relaxing movie or familiar music
- 7:00-8:00 – Bedtime routine
- 8:00 - Bed



Sample Daily Rhythm Template

Morning

- 7:00 – 8:00 – Wake up, bathroom routine
- 8:00 – 8:30 – Breakfast
- 8:30 – 9:00 – Calm music or quiet time (slow transition)
- 9:00 – 10:00 – Light activity (folding towels, simple crafts, sorting objects)
- 10:00 – 10:30 – Hydration + snack
- 10:30 – 11:00 – Short walk, chair exercises, or stretching

Mid – Day

- 12:00 – 12:45 – Lunch
- 12:45 – 1:15 – Relaxation (soft music, looking at nature, aromatherapy)
- 1:15 – 2:30 – Rest/nap (essential for cognitive reset)

Afternoon

- 2:30 – 3:00 – Hydration + snack
- 3:00 – 4:00 – Engagement (puzzles, reminiscing, photo albums)
- 4:00 – 5:00 – TV show, quiet activity, coloring

Evening

- 5:00 – 5:45 – Dinner
- 5:45 – 6:30 – Light activity (simple chores, music)
- 6:30 – 7:30 – Wind-down routine (dim lights, no screens)
- 7:30-8:00 – Bedtime routine
- 8:00 - Bed



Sample Daily Rhythm Template

Morning

- 8:00 – 9:00 – Wake + gentle stretching
- 9:00 – 9:30 – Breakfast
- 9:30 – 10:00 – Soft sensory activity (hand massage with lotion, warm washcloth, calming music)
- 10:00 – 11:00 – Passive engagement (watching birds, listening to stories, holding a fidget blanket)

Mid – Day

- 11:30 – 12:00 – Lunch
- 12:00 – 2:00 – Rest/nap (essential for cognitive reset)

Afternoon

- 2:00 – 2:30 – Hydration + snack
- 2:30 – 3:15 – Short activity (tactile object, simple art, prayer)
- 3:15 – 4:30 – Quiet Time

Evening

- 4:30 – 5:00 – Light meal
- 5:00 – 6:00 – Sensory soothing (dim lights, aromatherapy)
- 6:00 – 7:00 – Bedtime routine
- 7:00 - Bed



Low-Cost, High-Impact Activities

- **Purposeful Tasks**

- Folding towels or napkins
- Sorting
- Polishing silverware
- Organizing drawers or craft supplies
- Setting the table

- **Cognitive and Reminiscence**

- “What’s in the Bag?”
- Reminiscence cards
- Looking through donated magazines or photo books
- Finish-the-phrase (“You are my sunshine...”)

- **Music**

- Sing-alongs with lyric sheets
- Rhythm tapping using wooden spoons or hands
- Chair dancing
- Quiet background music during stressful times (sundowning)

- **Art & Creative Expression**

- Adult coloring pages
- Watercolor painting
- Dot markers
- Crafts using recycled materials
- Clay or Play-doh (great for hand strength!)



Tips for Successful Implementation

- Offer choice whenever possible
- Use short, frequent sessions rather than long ones
- Pair activities with familiar music to increase participation
- Document what works for each resident
- Train staff in validation communication
- Build programs around themes (seasons, holidays, decades, hobbies)



Tips for Successful Implementation

- Staging
- What is being offered?
 - List current activities/programs being offered Monday through Sunday
 - What is it?
 - Is it working well?
 - When is nothing happening?
 - What is missing?
- Learn how to
 - Do something new
 - Relook at an old skill and make it easier



How Can We Be Better Engagement Partners?



- Be willing to try something new
- Be willing to learn something different
- Be willing to see it through another's eyes
- Be willing to fail and try again



In Summary...

- Understand a holistic care environment by hearing how physical, emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual, and sensory factors interact in the lived experience of dementia.
- Learn core guiding principles, such as person-centered care, respect for autonomy, strengths-based support, and relationship-focused communication.
- Create a holistic environment by shaping personal spaces, routines, assessing abilities, and life history to promote safety, familiarity, and meaningful engagement.
- Identify practical tools and implementation methods to ensure consistency and quality across caregivers and settings.





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Resources

- Dementia Care: Offering Engagement for People Living with Dementia Teepa Snow MS, OTR/L, FAOTA

