

# PVMCI

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative | Summer 2024

# QUARTERLY

PVMCI is funded by The Eisenberg Family Trust and is made possible in part by a grant from Highland Valley Elder Services through funding under the Federal Older Americans Act. Participants sometimes ask how you can support PVMCI. If you are interested in donating, please call 413-582-2256.

Welcome to our PVMCI summer newsletter!

If you garden or appreciate flowers, you know hydrangeas have had a banner year in part because of our mild winter. However, we are now into the heat of summer and it's so important to stay hydrated. If you can, encourage drinking more fluids in the earlier part of the day, when people have more energy. We have included tips on how to best stay hydrated and what to look out for when the weather is warm.

One way to do this is with a "tea time", or "elevenses" as Karen Romanowski points out. This is a lovely way to spend time together and a way to break up the day.

We have also included a great list of summer activity ideas as well as information on our local summer concert series, most of which are free.

It's been one year since we started the Memory Cafés at the Northampton Senior Center (NSC) which are generally on the 4th Tuesday of every month. They've been well attended and received and we want to thank the staff at the NSC for all of their help and support. In August,

we'll be having a mini wellness café. If you have not attended, please consider doing so.

Wishing you all a lovely summer, and in the words of Morgan Harper Nichols:

*Let July be July.*

*Let August be August.*

*And let yourself*

*Just be*

*Even in*

*The uncertainty.*

*You don't have to fix*

*Everything.*

*And you can still*

*Find peace*

*And grow*

*In the wild*

*Rebecca Starr, MD, Director of the  
Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative*

## Make New Friends and Keep the Old

**W**hile it's easy to assume that forming new, meaningful friendships is difficult or even impossible for those living with dementia, research shows the profound benefits of fostering genuine social connections during this period. Developing supportive friendships can reduce isolation and loneliness, as well as providing a continued sense of identity, belonging, and purpose that enhances overall well-being.

Even as cognitive abilities decline, the need for companion-

- ◆ **Cognitive Stimulation:** Social interactions require the brain to stay active by engaging in communication, memory recall, problem-solving, and other cognitive processes. This mental stimulation helps build cognitive reserve and resilience against age-related cognitive decline.
- ◆ **Stress Reduction:** Having a strong social support system buffers against the negative impacts of stress. When we confide in close friends/family, it reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which can damage the brain over time. Social ties provide a sense of belonging and self-worth.



ship remains. Through shared activities, reminiscing, and simply being present, friends can tap into remaining strengths and reignite joy. These bonds create moments of understanding that transcend the dementia experience. Nurturing such friendships allows the person to feel truly seen and valued, boosting self-esteem and emotional health. Moreover, these relationships provide an invaluable lifeline of support for caregivers and family members. Close friendships become an additional source of respite, encouragement, and hands-on assistance through the caregiving journey. Fostering real friendships breathes new life and meaning into the dementia experience for all involved.

Here are more reasons supporting the value of friendship:

- ◆ **Increased Physical Activity:** Social engagements often involve some level of physical activity like walking, exercising, or participating in hobbies together. Physical activity promotes cardiovascular health and blood flow to the brain.
- ◆ **Positive Emotions:** Spending quality time with friends and loved ones triggers the release of neurotransmitters like oxytocin, dopamine, and endorphins associated with positive emotions. This emotional nourishment can improve mood, life satisfaction, and overall well-being.

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- ◆ **Healthy Behaviors:** We tend to mirror the health behaviors of our social circles. Having friends/family who exercise, eat well, and engage in cognitively stimulating activities can positively influence our own lifestyle choices.
- ◆ **Sense of Purpose:** Maintaining social roles and responsibilities gives older adults a sense of purpose and motivation, which are linked to better cognitive function and reduced risk of dementia.
- ◆ **Emotional Support:** The caregiving journey can be isolating at times. Having a strong social network allows you to share your experiences, seek advice, and find emotional support from others who understand the challenges you face.
- ◆ **Enhanced Relationship:** Positive social interactions can help preserve your loved one's sense of self and identity for longer. This allows you to continue connecting with them in meaningful ways, strengthening your cherished bond. Involving your loved one in an enriching social life doesn't just benefit them—it's an act of self care for you as their caregiver.

In summary, the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral benefits of social engagement work together to promote brain health and overall well-being as we age. In addition, with a robust support system and opportunities for respite, you'll be better equipped to provide the compassionate care they deserve.

If you're interested in making some new friends, consider getting involved in the PVMCI Family Connections Program, described here:

### **What is the Family Connections Program?**

The Family Connections Program offers participating PVMCI families the opportunity to be connected to another participating family. This is a voluntary program for PVMCI

participants and is open to anyone wanting to join.

### **The goals of the Family Connections Program are to:**

- Increase connections to other families in your community who are also living with dementia.
- Reduce social isolation and loneliness that can sometimes come with a dementia diagnosis.
- Allow people living with dementia the opportunity to spend time with others who are also living with this diagnosis in a non-judgmental atmosphere.
- Allow caregivers the chance to spend time with other caregivers to share their experiences and expertise.

### **How will we be connected to another family?**

Your Memory Care Specialist will share your name(s) and contact information with another participating family. You can then choose to meet the other family either with or

without the company of your Memory Care Specialist. You can choose to get together in person or just talk on the phone. The options are up to you!

### **How will family matching be done?**

Your Memory Care Specialist will consider various factors when matching families

including ages, town you live in and proximity to another family, interests, and family make-up that will contribute to a successful pairing!

### **What if we want to stop participating?**

You may stop participating in the Family Connections Program at any time. We know that circumstances change when dealing with a dementia diagnosis.

### **How do I join the Family Connections Program?**

Please speak to your Memory Care Specialist for more details about participating in this program. ❖





*Attendees of the Northampton Memorable Moments Café in June enjoyed music played by the Gn'C Duo. Hits from the 50s, 60s, and 70s as well as some polka tunes were very popular and got people dancing, or singing along!*



# MEMORABLE *moments* CAFÉ

Presented by Northampton Senior Center,  
Northampton Neighbors, Pioneer Valley Memory Care  
Initiative & Highland Valley Elder Services  
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of Massachusetts Foundation.



**ABOUT MEMORY CAFES:** Memory Cafes are social get-togethers for people living with memory loss or dementia and their caregivers. The meetings offer a fun activity as well as time for caregivers to share experiences and connect with other caregivers. Caregivers are strongly encouraged to stay for the duration of the meeting.

**WHERE:** Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz Street, Northampton MA

**WHEN:** 4th Tuesday of each month from 1:00-2:30pm. A fun activity, a light snack and a beverage will be offered.

**RSVP REQUIRED:** Please call the Northampton Senior Center at 413-587-1228 to register. Space is limited so please RSVP early to assure a space!

**LUNCH AT THE SENIOR CENTER:** Participants can also sign up for lunch at the Senior Center. Separate registration is required. Pre-registration and payment is due 48 hours in advance. You can sign up online at [www.myactivecenter.com](http://www.myactivecenter.com), call the front desk at 587-1228 or stop by the front desk.



# Heat Safety Tips for our Warming World

*Adapted from The Alzheimer's Foundation of America: Health Safety Tips for Families Affected by Dementia, July 2023*

**We** have been experiencing a rise in heat and the heat index in our area and around the world. Triple-digit temperatures and heat indexes are especially dangerous for someone with a dementia-related illness such as Alzheimer's disease because the effects of dementia can impair their ability to notice if they are developing heat stroke or dehydration," said

Jennifer Reeder, LCSW, SIFI, Director of Educational and Social Services for the Alzheimer's Foundation of America. "Taking a few simple steps will go

a long way to help caregivers keep their loved one with dementia safe during the heat wave."

Watch out for wandering. Wandering is a common and potentially dangerous behavior for individuals with dementia, as they can get lost or become disoriented, and not know how or who to call for help. It's even more dangerous in extreme heat conditions, where heat stroke (a serious elevation in body temperature that is sparked by exposure to extreme environmental heat or a mixture of heat and humidity) can develop in minutes.

Monitor the person's fluid intake. Alzheimer's disease and other dementia-related illnesses can affect a person's ability to know when they are thirsty, thus making it critically

important for caregivers to monitor fluid intake and encourage them to drink frequently. Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages, as these drinks may contribute to dehydration.

Observe the person for heat stroke warning signs. Dementia-related illnesses can make it harder for a person to detect temperature changes, putting them at greater risk for heat stroke. Watch for warning signs such as excessive sweating, exhaustion, hot, dry, or red skin, muscle cramps, rapid pulse, headaches, dizziness, nausea, or sudden changes in mental status. If the person is exhibiting these warning signs, such actions as resting in an air-conditioned room, removing clothing, applying cold compresses, and drinking fluids can all help cool the body. If the person faints, exhibits

excessive confusion or is unconscious, call 911 immediately.

Plan ahead. Blackouts and other power failures can sometimes occur during heat waves. Make sure that cell



phones, tablets, and other electrical devices are fully charged. Flashlights should be easily accessible in case of a power failure. Have the emergency contact numbers for local utility providers, as well as the police and fire departments, readily accessible.

Have a long-distance plan if necessary. If you don't live near your loved one, arrange for someone nearby to check on them. Inform this contact person about emergency contacts, and where important medical information, such as an insurance card, is kept. Make sure your loved one has plenty of water, and has access to air conditioning or other cooling mechanisms. ❖

# Tea Time, Anyone?

~Karen Romanowski, RN

**P**reparing meals, encouraging adequate nutrition, and finding meaningful activities for someone living with memory loss can be daunting. Some years ago, I lived in England for three months and every morning we gathered for “Elevenses.” The farmers and their families would join for tea and a sweet or savory treat. It was a pause in the morning routine to take a breath, rejuvenate and move on with the day.

Consider planning your own tea time using this easy, healthy, blueberry orange bread recipe. You might take advantage of a local u-pick blueberry farm to gather your berries, invite a neighbor or friend to join you for tea, or play some music while you

and your loved one enjoy a pause.

Sipping decaffeinated or herbal tea—hot or iced—will keep you hydrated too! ❖



## *Blueberry Orange Juice Bread (adapted from “Just a Taste”)*

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons light olive oil
- 2/3 cup orange juice
- 1 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 cups whole wheat pastry or regular flour
- 1 cup blueberries fresh or frozen (if frozen keep frozen until adding)
- Turbinado sugar (optional for sprinkling on top before baking)

### **Directions:**

*Preheat oven to 350. Grease a loaf pan.*

Combine wet ingredients and sugar and mix well. Add dry ingredients and stir until just combined. Fold in the blueberries gently.

Bake for 50-60 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Cool in pan for 10 minutes. Remove and allow to cool before slicing.

This recipe also makes great muffins, if preferred. Just follow the same recipe and bake for 20-30 minutes.





### **Florence Summer Concert Series, Florence**

Concerts are free and will take place every Thursday from 6:30-8:00 pm at the Florence Civic Center from May 30th through September 5th. Bring your lawn chair, relax, and enjoy the music!

### **Arts in the Park Series & Millside Movies, Easthampton**

The Easthampton Parks and Recreation Department will hold free concerts on Fridays, 6:30 - 8:00 pm, unless noted otherwise, from June to mid-August, at the Millside Park bandshell at 2 Ferry Street.

### **Bands on Brewster, Northampton**

The City of Northampton and Northampton Brewery are proud to present live concerts with world-class artists on stage at Brewster Court, a vibrant walkway between the E.J. Gare Parking Garage and the back entrance of the Northampton Brewery. Free live shows are held every Thursday night in June, July, and August, starting at 6:00 pm and ending at 8:00 pm.

### **Summer on Strong, Northampton**

Summer on Strong is a summer-long party on Strong Avenue. When the weather warms up, this side-street becomes pedestrian-only, so you can dine outdoors, stroll the shops, dance in the street, and celebrate community. Join us in July from 5 - 8pm Wednesday – Saturday and 4 – 7pm on Sundays for free concerts at The Dowd Insurance Performance Stage.

### **South Hadley Summer Concert Series, South Hadley**

The South Hadley Recreation Department offers free concerts at the Gazebo on the Town Common every Thursday evening from the end of June through August. The bands play 6:30 - 8:00 pm and a different band is scheduled each week. You are encouraged to bring blankets or chairs to sit on. Parking is available in the marked spaces around the Town Common and in the Village Commons.

### **Amherst Summer Music Series, Amherst**

The Amherst Business Improvement District presents a series of free concerts for the entire community to enjoy at Sweetser Park in the Town Common every Friday in July starting at 5pm.

### **Hatfield MA Summer Concert Series, Hatfield**

Hatfield MA has a free summer concert series that takes place in the town park next door to the townhall. Concerts are free and open to the public. Bring your own chairs and blankets. Food vendors to be announced. Personal food and beverages also permitted.

### **Stanley Park, Westfield**

Sunday night concert series in the Beveridge Pavilion. Performances begin at 6:00 pm and are free of charge. Chairs provided and food service will be available from The Bubble Mug Cafe at Pottery Cellar.

### **For more local events, visit the following websites:**

- <https://explorewesternmass.com>
- <https://visithampshirecounty.com>
- <https://valleyadvocate.com/events/#/>



# SUMMER ACTIVITY IDEAS

**S**ummer is here, and with it, all the enjoyable activities we know and love. Regular activities for people with dementia are incredibly beneficial and engaging in summertime activities can help boost everyone's mental health. Below is a list of activities to consider.



**Plant a Garden** - Planting a small garden lets those with dementia enjoy the summer sun, increases their vitamin D, regulates circadian rhythms, and strengthens muscles as they pour soil, dig holes, and insert seeds. If that sounds like too much physical work, buy a few pots of flowers, small plants, or herbs to tend to. Gardening is an excellent activity

because it is ongoing and offers tangible results.

**Watch the Birds** - Bird-watching is an excellent option for people with dementia. It is not physically or mentally demanding and people can do it from inside or outside their home. You can buy a birdhouse or add to the experience by building a birdhouse. You can even get a variety of feeders to attract different types of birds or even get a feeder for squirrels. Watching squirrels eat shelled peanuts is quite fun! Hang the feeders near where you or your loved one likes to sit and enjoy.



**Make Frozen Treats** - The summer sun puts older adults at risk for dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. Making frozen treats, such as fruit pops or flavored ice cubes, requires little effort and keeps your loved one cool. Experiment with different flavors of juice, tea, and soda to find the perfect frozen treat.

**Enjoy a Picnic** - When the weather is nice, pack a light lunch and head outside for a picnic. Bring a blanket and some lawn chairs, and head to your favorite park – or stay in your own backyard, if that works better for you. Simple sandwiches, fruit, cold beverages, and crackers are all excellent choices for summertime snacking.



**Visit a Park** - During the summer, local parks come alive with the sounds of laughing children, people exercising, and chirping birds. Your loved one may have fun chatting with other park visitors or simply enjoy staring peacefully at a pond or fountain.

**Go to a Farmer's Market** - Summer is the prime time for farmers' markets. Many of these markets have outdoor stands during the summer months, so you can spend time outdoors while hunting for nutritious, memory-preserving foods such as carrots and leafy greens.



**Go Swimming** – Nothing says summer like outdoor swimming. Head to an outdoor pool or, if your loved one is steady on their feet, a local watering hole or beach. There is adaptive equipment available at some beaches.

**Watch Old Movies** - If the day is too hot or it is raining cats and dogs, make the most of it and hold a TV or movie marathon with your loved one. Pop some popcorn, grab a few delicious snacks and sit down to watch a favorite funny movie or classic TV show from their childhood. Bonus points if it was a “top summer flick” from when your loved one was young.

**Take a Trip Down Memory Lane** - Summer memories from



years past are some of our most beloved. Using reminiscence therapy may help your loved one recall those

cherished moments from their childhood. Gather old scrapbooks from summer vacations, find souvenirs from previous trips, or make a memory box with materials that evoke a scene (like a beach). As you share your observations and memories, your loved one may be prompted to do the same. Be sure to keep a notepad handy to write down any surprising stories or memories that come up.

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**Go to a Game** - If your friend or loved one enjoys summer sports like baseball, take them to a game. Revisiting the sports and activities they loved in their younger years can help bring back positive memories. Encourage them to tell you how it was when they played and what they enjoyed the most about it.




**Take in a Concert** - Music is a magical tool for helping people with dementia. Few things have the power to soothe and generate memories like tunes from their past. Many cities and towns have free concerts all summer long, featuring an array of musical genres. So, whether your loved one is into jazz, classical, country, or gospel, there'll be a concert for them.



**Go for a Country Drive** - A drive in the country is fun and relaxing for everyone, but it might be extra special to someone raised on a farm or in a rural environment. As you go, try to point out the things they might recall from their own lives, like corn growing in the fields or cows and horses out to pasture; even something as mundane as a barn or silo could make their day. If appropriate, you can try to engage them in a conversation about what life was like when they were growing up. You might even find out something you never knew about them.

**Paint with Watercolors** - An inexpensive set of watercolors, brushes, and paper can make for a fun, creative, and quiet visit. If you can, go outdoors and choose a tree or flower for you both to paint so your loved one doesn't have to struggle with that decision. Guide them and help them as needed to rinse their brush and try new colors. When you're finished, don't forget to sign and date the pictures and find a place to display them in your loved one's room. Having the pictures visible will be a nice reminder of the day you spent together.



 **Go for Ice Cream** - Who doesn't love an ice cream cone on a hot summer day? Make an adventure of it by searching for the best ice cream in the area.

**Arrange Flowers** - This is a simple task your loved one might enjoy if they ever had a passion for flowers, gardening, or other related pastimes. All you need are cut flowers (try your local grocery store), a vase (preferably plastic), and a little patience. As you cut the stems to size, hand them to your loved one and instruct them gently how to arrange each.

**Sit by the Water** - Whether you have access to a lake cottage, a pool, a flowing creek, or a rambling river, find a comfortable place to sit back and relax. Water can be a very calming and soothing element for someone with dementia. You will want to be extra careful not to leave your loved one unattended by water, but the sound of moving water and the reflections cast by the surface of a water body can be comforting and beautiful. If possible, you might even take a little stroll in the sand and let the waves lap at your bare feet.

**Stargaze on a Clear Night** - Summer is one of the most temperate times to sit outside late into the evening. Stargazing can include the use of a telescope, or just the naked eye. Check your library or the Internet for guides on the stars, planets, and constellations visible in your hemisphere at any given time. By following the local news, you can also find out when a meteor shower is likely.



**Visit a Local Museum** - Museums are great options on hot summer days when spending too much time outside could be dangerous or uncomfortable for your loved one. Before heading out, check to see if your local museum offers a senior discount or senior-friendly visiting hours. Plan your parking and mealtimes ahead of time to ensure the day goes smoothly.

With a little bit of planning, you can create a summer filled with fun and meaningful activities for both you and your loved one.

*~Christine Grimaldi, OTR/L, Memory Care Specialist*