

# Alzheimer's Activity Mats



## Purpose

Activity mats are designed to safely stimulate and soothe people with Alzheimer's, dementia, autism, ADD, head trauma, or persons recovering from strokes. Our activity mats are made by volunteers and donated to care facilities and caregivers. Every mat we make is different, depending on how volunteers customize the mats.

## Personalize as you wish

These instructions are just ideas we have tried and tested. Use what you like! Customize your Activity Mats to suit your intended users. We have given detailed instructions to help those with limited sewing experience. You are encouraged to be creative, use the items you like and the methods that work best for you. Do keep safety for users in mind. Secure items to withstand constant pulling and commercial laundry.

## Mats provide stimulation and agitation relief for people with dementia

- Zippers, buttons, strings of beads and bells, objects to squeeze and stretch, yarn or braiding ribbons provide tactile stimulation and exercise for arms, hands, and fingers.
- Soft toy animals, furry pockets, and yarn bundles provide soothing relief for sore hands or agitation.
- Squeakers and light-up items, a vinyl pocket for photos or memory notes, and use of familiar objects such as button closures provide memory and therapy stimulation.



- Different colors, textures, pictures, and light-up toys provide visual stimulation.
- Bells and squeeze toys with squeakers provide auditory stimulation.

### **Mats provide relief to caregivers**

The mat is an aid to help caregivers calm and entertain users.

- **Mats and other aids are greatly appreciated by nursing homes, adult day programs as well as families caring for persons with dementia, traumatic brain injury or related cognitive impairments.**
- It's heartwarming to know that the mats are made by caring volunteers.

### **Making activity mats is a great volunteer opportunity**

- Making mats is a wonderful way to help people with dementia and their caregivers.
- People with mild dementia can join in and feel welcome and productive.
- As a group activity, it is a fun, creative, social opportunity that contributes to a worthy cause.
- Prior sewing experience is handy but not necessary, and there are plenty of tasks that don't involve sewing, such as cutting fabric, stringing beads, and organizing supplies for group assembly.
- Young people can learn to sew and experience the fulfillment of volunteerism.

### **Suggestions from caregivers and professionals**

- The mat size specified here is especially designed for use in a wheelchair, as an apron, or on a tabletop.
- Alzheimer's residents who were excluded from bingo at a local facility now have this alternative tabletop activity.
- Therapist find that mats help focus the user's attention.

### **Important note regarding mat safety:**

The mats are safe when used as intended and with caregiver supervision. (Especially note sensitivity blinking lights, swallowing hazards, breakable items, etc.)

The mats are not intended for use by child.

Mats are easily personalized with clip-on items that best suit the user.



## Equipment Needed to Make Activity Mats

- Basic sewing machine with straight and zigzag stitches, bobbins, appropriate feet. Decorative stitches and automatic buttonhole are nice features but and not required.
- A serger is helpful but not necessary.
- Basic tools (scissors, seam ripper, chalk or other removable marker, etc.)
- Hand sewing needle and thread.

### Supplies are listed with instructions.

- All attached supplies should be durable, non breakable, without sharp edges, etc.
- If items are not washable they should be attached with split rings that are easily removed by caregiver before washing the mats.

## How to Make the Activity Mat Base

### Option 1: envelope method

#### Supplies:

- 1 piece of 12" x 17" stiff stabilizer (such as Timtex or Pellon Untra Firm)
- 2 pieces of 13" x 19" fabric for front and back
- Thread to coordinate with fabric

#### Instructions:

1. Lay back, right-side-up flat on table
2. Lay front, right-side-down on top of back.
3. Lay the stabilizer on top of front, leave 1 ½" on left side, ½" on other sides.
4. Pin the 3 layers together. Do not press until after turning.
5. Sew around the 3 edges with ½" seam allowance, close to the stabilizer, but through the fabric layers only. Leave the left hand side open.
6. Turn the fabric layers inside out. The stabilizer is now inside the fabric case.
7. At the open end of the mat, fold the top fabric inward, around the end of the mat and inside the opening. Fold the back fabric inward, even with the top layer. Press.
8. Sew down the open end close to the edge and continue sewing around the mat.



## Option 2: serged edge method



### Supplies:

- 1 piece of 12" x 17" (or 12 ½" x 17 ½") stiff stabilizer (as Timtex or Peltex Ultra Firm)
- 1 piece of 12" x 17" (or 12 ½" x 17 ½") fabric for front of the base
- 1 piece of 13" x 18" fabric for back of the base

### Instructions:

1. If one or both side of your stabilizer is fusible, fuse it now. Otherwise, pin at least 2" away from edges, spray baste, or sew 1/8" from the edges of mat to hold the 3 layers together.
2. Serge each edge, leaving thread tails at least 5" long.
3. Thread tails into a large eyed needle and pull thread tails back from corners through serging on back of mat.
4. Use plenty of Fray Check or other securing product on the corner.



## How to Embellish the Activity Mat

### Make two button holes for apron strings

#### Instructions:

1. Sew a long button hole (more than  $\frac{1}{2}$ " ) in each upper corners of the base mat, about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the edges. Wait until the mat is complete before inserting ribbon for apron strings.

### Attach a zipper

#### Supplies:

- 1 colorful zipper, 7" to 12" long with plastic teeth. ('Separating zippers' allow you to mix colors. Make-A-Zipper or other zippers on a roll can save you money.)
- Sturdy sewing thread in a bright, contrasting color.
- Standard sewing foot (gives you a chance to show off decorative stitches).

#### Instructions:

1. Position the zipper on the mat near the top between the button holes. Note that the zipper must be easy to open and close, so take special care not to attach the two sides too far apart.
2. Pin the zipper in place. (Optional Sew outside edges with thread matching the zipper.)

3. Sew along each edge with decorative stitch. Move zipper pull as needed but be sure needle is down when you move it.



## Make rickrack or ribbon loops (for attaching items)

### Supplies:

12"-18" length of rickrack or ribbon

### Instructions:

1. Draw a line for ribbon placement. Position ribbon or rickrack on the mat. Pin in place.
2. Tuck the raw ends under.
3. Tack one end, the tack every 2 inches or so, leaving some slack between loops.
4. Wait till mat is finished to attach objects.

## Make a Texture Pocket

### Option 1: double-sided fabric method

### Supplies:

- One 7" square of double-sided fuzzy fabric. We found a fabric with faux leopard suede on one side and soft faux fur on the other. (Caution: fuzzy fabrics may shed and raw edges may need to be serged or covered.)

### Instructions:

1. Position the pocket on the mat.
2. Fold a cuff at the top of the pocket.
3. Optional: make a loose pleat in the bottom of the pocket.
4. Sew the sides and bottom of the pocket to the mat

**Note:** Be sure to sew securely and tack at top of seams.

**Pockets must stand-up to users and caregivers may not be able to fix tears.**





## Option 2: serged method (with square or round corners)

### Supplies:

- Two 7"-8" squares of fuzzy fabrics

### Instructions:

(For rounded corners, fold thicker fabric in half, cut rounded corner.)

1. Pin two fabrics wrong-sides-together.
2. Serge around sides and secure any thread tails.
3. Fold cuff & Attach to mat as in option 1.



## Option 3: envelope method

### Supplies:

- Two 7" squares of fuzzy fabrics. Only one thick fabric.

### Instructions:

1. Line up raw edges of the two squares, right-sides together.
2. Sew a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam around 3 edges, leaving the 4<sup>th</sup> edge open.
3. Turn pocket inside out and gently push out the corners.
4. Fold the open edges evenly inside the envelope.
5. Top stitch across the edge of the open end.
6. Attach to mat as in option 1.



## Make a photo pocket

### Supplies:

- One 5 ½" x 8" piece of clear vinyl
- ½" to 1 ½" washable ribbon or rickrack

### Instructions:

1. Fold down one of the 5 ½" sides to form a square.
2. Position the vinyl on the mat with the short fold at the top, with fold facing down.
3. Frame the sides and bottom of the pocket with pieces of ribbon or rickrack.  
(Be sure to enclose raw edge ends of ribbon or rickrack.)
4. Frame should cover the edges of the vinyl.
5. Sew down both edges of the ribbon close to the edges.
6. Insert photograph or memory note into the pocket.



## Make button flaps

### Supplies:

- Two 7" squares of fabric
- Two buttons diameter ½" or more  
(and less than max size for automatic button hole foot)

### Instructions:

1. Lay fabrics right sides together.
2. Sew ¼" seam along the 4 edges of the square.
3. Cut in half forming two 3 ½" x 7" rectangles
4. Turn inside out. Press.
5. Fold the open edges evenly inside the envelope. Press.
6. Mark, then sew two button holes in one of the flaps about ½" from sewn long side.
7. Use button holes to mark position for buttons.  
Buttons should be about ¾" from the sewn edge.





8. Attach the buttons. Button them.
  9. Position the flaps on the mat with open edges
  10. Pin in place.
  11. Sew the **outer** (open long side ) of each flap
- !Caution. Flaps should open easily when



### Attach clip-on items



**Squeakers**



**Light up**



**Soft and Fun**

### Supplies:

- Split rings (available at Jo Ann's, Hobby Lobby, etc.)
- Loop with glittery ribbon, rickrack, yarn, streamers, pompoms, braiding tassels,
- Small 3" to 5" soft stuffed animal and a soft band for collar
- Strings of beads, bells, buttons, stretchy pony tail rings, etc.
- Key chains with safe, interesting items of significance to the user(s)
- Stretch party bracelets,
- Small glitter wands,
- Squeaker toys (Squeakers are at Nancy's Notions, Annie's and many pet stores)
- Light up squeeze toys (**Caution!!** Not for individuals with epilepsy and some other users )
- Anything safe and interesting you think would appeal to users.

### Instructions:

1. Put each item on a split ring and attach to a rickrack or ribbon loop on the mat.

## **Attach apron string ribbons (Optional)**

### **Supplies:**

- 1 yard or more of wide, colorful ribbon (washable preferred)

### **Instructions:**

Pull a ribbon through each button holes at the top corner of the mat and tie a bow.

Ribbons are basically decorative, but they are also useful to turn the mat into a waist apron or to tie the mat loosely onto a chair.

## **Feedback Welcomed**

**These instructions are just ideas we have tried and tested. Use what you like! Be creative and help us improve the aids. Customize your Alzheimer's Aid to suit your intended user(s).**

**Your feedback on instructions or needs of users and caregivers is welcomed. Post your comments or suggestions on our blog at**

**[www.alzactivityaids.blogspot.com](http://www.alzactivityaids.blogspot.com).**

**Two **upcoming requests** will be addressed as soon as possible.**

- 1. Weighted mats for persons with leg or body tremors, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson's, etc.**
- 2. Velcro flap or loop.**