

Fidget Quilts for Alzheimer's and Dementia Patients (aka "touch" or "activity" quilts) Overview and Instructions



- These quilts are textured lap quilts designed for those who need sensory stimulation, especially those with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Straightforward to make, these charity quilts have an incredible impact on quality of life. "Sensory stimulation can increase happiness, enjoyment and relaxation as well as lessen sadness and fear".
- The idea is to provide textures and items for the Alzheimer's patient to fiddle with, giving them something to do with their hands. Select the fabric with your fingers, not your eyes. It is the textures of fabric that make a touch quilt.
- Try making them with all different textured material such as denim (old jeans), fleece, flannel (old pajamas), silk (old ties), seersucker, fake fur, velvet, satin (old bridesmaid dresses), corduroy, wool, nylon, cotton, faux suede, poplin, tulle (with a sturdy backing), terry cloth (towels), pieces of crochet doilies (attached to a backing), and textured home decorator fabrics (old flannel backed table cloths, old pillow covers, old furniture covers). Squares with pockets (with or without buttoned flap such as from a men's old work shirt or old jeans back pockets, zippered pockets) are also good. Pockets allow the patients a place to put favorite items. Dementia patients will do repetitive things with their hands, so zippers become a great way to provide an activity. Zipping and unzipping is tactile, and provides a bit of sound too. Crinkle texture and sound (potato chip bag between two fabrics) are other ideas.
- Well secured embellishments such as fringe, lace, rickrack, large beads, large buttons, metal rings, braid, beading, and ribbons add additional tactile elements. Any attachments must be securely fastened and nothing should allow pinching or tangling of fingers.
- Ideal dimensions of a finished fidget quilt would be lap size – about 36 inches square. This would involve blocks of sizes: 6" (6 blocks x 6 blocks); 7" (5 blocks x 5 blocks); or 8" (4/5 blocks x 4/5 blocks) – with maybe a textured border of 2". Each square should be a different texture. Try to include a square of fake fur. This often reminds the patient of stroking a pet animal.
- Sashing is not needed. Borders are not necessarily needed. The backing should be fleece or flannel since it provides warmth and helps keep the quilt from sliding off the lap. No need for batting if using fleece. Binding could be as simple as having the backing turned to the front and secured.
- Bright colors are encouraged, although many of these patients have poor or no eyesight. This is why the need for a variety of tactile sensations.
- The quilting should be simple such as a wide zigzag stitch in the ditch and/or X through each block.
- Keep in mind that these quilts may be laundered in commercial machines so they should be able to withstand very hot water and a hot dryer.

For questions or donations of materials or completed touch quilts, please see Patty Jensen, Terry Newcomer, or Cindy Walker.