Making Fidget Mats

For Alzheimer’s and Dementia Residents

Instructions for Making a Fidget or Busy Quilt

The purpose of the quilts is to keep residents’ hands busy and their minds active and calm through sensory stimulation. That said, there are some elements to avoid and things to include when making your quilts.

Things to Avoid

1. Please do not include any rough textures. As we age, our skin becomes thinner and more sensitive to rough textures, and sometimes these textures can damage hands. So avoid anything rough, sharp, scratchy, or with jagged or pointed edges.
2. Avoid mirrors or anything reflective. Often Alzheimer’s and dementia patients don’t recognize themselves and seeing a stranger staring back at them can be alarming.
3. Please avoid activities that require fine motor skills: buttoning, lacing, and similar activities. Fine motor skills deteriorate with these diseases and these activities are very frustrating for residents.
4. Make sure your mat is safe: nothing breakable, everything is secured and cannot be pulled off. No choking hazards.
5. We are trying to calm busy minds, so please avoid chaotic patterned fabric and color combinations. I know high contrast colors are an element of modern quilting, but consider this an opportunity to practice low volume color combinations, analogous and harmonious color combinations. Bright colors are fine.

Things to Include

1. Make sure it is washable. Not just the fabric but any other elements attached to it.
2. It should have 10-14 non-rough textures that provide easy sensory input. Soft, fluffy, bumpy, yarn, felt, quilting textures, buttons, bric a brac, zippers, ric rac, pockets, fake fur, felt, fleece, flannel, lace, fringe, etc.
3. Everything should be secured onto the quilt; machine sewing things on is best. If hand sewing buttons make sure they are secure.
4. Design your quilt so that it is well organized and orderly—we are avoiding chaos and bringing order and calmness.
5. Please add a blank label on the back so that the name of the recipient can be written on it. The Memory Center has asked that we include our names printed small on these labels so that families can write a thank you letter.
6. Please attach a strap that can Velcro closed or be tied closed. This will be used to secure the quilt to a chair arm, wheelchair, walker, bedrail, etc to prevent it from falling on the floor (see the instructions).

7. We are making these for men and women. Choose either gender neutral fabric/colors or you can make it highly gendered with novelty prints and gendered colors.

8. Fun! If you have fun making it they will have fun using it.

**Try Some New Things**
These are small quilts and we are going for texture. So this is a great opportunity to practice your free motion quilting, new quilting patterns, new blocks, new batting fibers, embroidery or machine embroidery and applique. Use the Fidget Quilts to learn something new, try something new, or to practice some skills.

**Construction**
You have 2 size options for these quilts:

- A 2x3’ or 2x2’ lap quilt
- A placemat size quilt, about 12x18”/13x19”

**Supplies**
- **Top:** fabric
  - Non-pieced top: a piece of fabric the size of the top you want to make
  - Pieced top: any quilt block pattern, single large block, or a few small blocks with negative space the size of the quilt top you want to make (feel free to use your scraps)
- **Batting**
  - Traditional binding method: a few inches bigger than the Busy quilt you will make
  - Envelope method: same size as the top
- **Backing**
  - Traditional binding method: a few inches bigger than the Busy quilt you will make
  - Envelope method: same size as the top
- **Embellishments**
  - Any soft, fuzzy, tactile fabric: fleece, flannel, fake fur, felt, minky scraps, lace, etc whatever you have in your stash or scraps. Even small pieces of batting are ok
  - A variety of trims: braids, brocade, dingle balls, tassels, ric rac, ribbon, yarn, etc
  - A variety of accessories: buttons, beads, pockets, etc
  - Any fabric to cut into shapes and machine applique on
  - If your machine does decorative stitches, consider adding these to the quilt too for an easy embellishment
  - Hand embroidery is fine too
- **Notions:** sewing machine, thread for machine sewing and quilting; scissors and rotary cutter, pins, needle and thread if hand sewing buttons or beads, feet for your sewing machine (regular, quarter inch, walking foot, FMQ foot depending on what you will do)
- **Strap:** woven strap (webbing) about 1-1.5” wide and 15” long, square of Velcro.
- **Marking tool:** ( chalk pencil)

You can either do traditional binding or an envelope method.
**Traditional Binding**

1. Make your quilt top the way you normally would or according to the pattern.
2. Baste and quilt your top as you want. Do not trim or square it yet.
3. Add any machine applique or embroidery that you plan to include.
4. Once quilted, arrange your embellishments on the quilt and either pin or baste them in place.
5. Then machine stitch them onto the top. Make sure they are secured onto the top. If you are using buttons or beads, make sure they will not come off when tugged.
6. Square up your quilt and trim it.
7. Now make the strap. Sew a straight line across the 2 raw ends of the webbing so it doesn’t fray. Fold the strap in half and pin it to the back of the quilt with the fold on the edge of the quilt and the 2 ends lying across/toward the middle quilt. Pin in place.
8. Now pin your binding on going over the fold of the strap. Sew the binding on the way you normally would, making sure to sew over the strap fold.
9. Flip your binding over and machine stitch from the top to secure the back of the binding. (See below for machine sewn binding tutorials).
10. Add the Velcro to your strap ends if needed and attach your blank label to the back.
11. You are done!

**Envelope Method**

1. Piece your quilt top.
   a. If you are going to do any machine applique or machine embroidery you can do this now. I recommend using some fusible stabilizer for the applique then machine stitching around the edge.
   b. If you want to do FMQ, you can put the batting on the back and quilt it without a back (like quilt as you go method), or use a piece of muslin
2. Machine sew the label on to your back leaving enough room to do the ½” seam around the edge of the quilt.
3. Lay the back and top right sides together on a table.
4. Lay the batting on top of these 2 layers so it is facing you (skip this step if you did 1b).
5. Pin the layers together or use Clover clips.
6. Using a straight stitch at ½” seam allowance, sew the layers together, leaving an 8-10” opening at one end (do not sew the entire thing up).
7. Trim the layers so they are even, and trim the corners off to reduce bulk.
8. Turn the quilt right side out through the opening and turn the raw edges of the opening under so they are even with the edges of the quilt.
9. Get your strap and stitch across the 2 ends to prevent fraying. Now fold it in half lengthwise so the 2 raw ends are even. Insert the folded end into the opening of the quilt at least 1” leaving the 2 raw ends outside the quilt.
10. Press and pin the opening with the strap inserted; and smooth out the quilt so there aren’t any wrinkles or puckers.
11. Top stitch around the edge of the quilt about 1/4” or less from the edge. Sew the opening closed with the strap inserted so it will be secure.
12. You can either straight line quilt this or do some basic FMQ like a meander or wavy lines.
13. Place your embellishments on the quilt, pinning or basting them on. Then use your sewing machine to sew them on.
14. Now add the Velcro to the end of your straps if needed. You’re done!

Resources

- Examples of the envelope or serged methods:
  - http://www.suggys.co.uk/Leanne/alzheimersdementia-fidget-lap-blanket/

- Examples of quilted versions:

- Machine Binding Tutorials
  - Cluck Cluck Sew http://cluckclucksew.com/2013/01/machine-binding-tutorial.html
  - Man Sewing YouTube video (zipper foot works on this method too)

- Making a felt flower: http://www.suggys.co.uk/Leanne/felt-rose-pram-hood-magnetic-charm-how-to-do-it/

- Check Pinterest for inspiration, search Fidget Quilts