

# Touch Quilts Introduction

A Fidget, Fiddle, Touch Quilt or Sensory Activity Blanket is a small lap quilt, mat or blanket that provides sensory and tactile stimulation for the restless or "fidgety" hands of someone with Alzheimer's disease, or related dementia, autism, and developmental challenges. These quilts are pieced from fabrics with a variety of textures and colors placed next to one another, and embellished with accents or simple accessories such as pockets, laces, trims, appliques, buttons, secured beads, ribbons, braids etc. The most common use of touch quilts is to comfort, calm and stimulate anxious patients with mid-to late-stage Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. (The information presented here was developed for use with dementia patients, although it is widely applicable.) With these patients, the quilts are a therapeutic tool and can reduce the need for sedatives. They enable some people to sit calmly and happily, through a concert for instance, when otherwise they would be reaching out touching and disturbing those around them and becoming anxious themselves.

Typically, the quilts are made of blocks, each a fabric of a different texture from other blocks in the quilt — it is **texture that provides the therapy**. No pattern is required to create a fidget quilt or blanket. Although tactile quilts can be made any size, most are small. Those for wheelchair-bound patients should be quite small, about 2 feet [60 cm] square, so they won't get caught in the wheels. Somewhat larger quilts, about 3 feet [90 cm] square, work better for mobile patients and are sometimes hung on walls to attract patients to come and touch.



Touch quilts are not difficult to make, although care is required to make them safe and sturdy. All attachments must be well sewn down as anxious patients will often throw or swing these quilts about. Each block should be large enough that all five fingers can touch it and move around to feel the tactile variety of the blocks. They should **never** have anything sharp or heavy on them and **nothing** that will fly away from the surface or can be pulled, twisted, or pried off. Bright **colours** are good, especially red; but any colour combination that you like will likely be pleasing for some patients. Note, however, that patients with Alzheimer's disease tend to see black as a hole in the quilt. Therefore use black sparingly, as no more than a bit of trim.

Quilts destined for care facilities where yellow is used to indicate no-go zones should have little or no yellow.

While there is good evidence that well-made tactile quilts generally have calming, soothing and comforting effects, there is precious little evidence that any specific feature, any particular texture, noise, or embellishment is necessary for the calming effect, or more likely to achieve calming than any other specific feature. It is probable that the rule of different strokes for different folks applies: any given feature calms some and not others. By making our quilts all different — different textures and mixtures of textures and embellishments (or not), it can be a process that is enjoyed by the quilter and useful to recipients.

These instructions are meant to help those who want to make a touch quilt for someone they love. The various PDFs lay out how to design and make these very valuable quilts. There is also a number of block designs and enhancements which can be added to the quilt blocks for you to adapt, if you wish.