

# How to Make Touch Quilts

When making a Touch Quilt think about the needs of Alzheimer patients and how the quilt will be used. In residences the quilts are used in several ways. Smaller quilts, 24 to 30 inches square, are put in the lap of wheelchair-bound patients, encouraging them to move and explore with their fingers. Quilts are also left around or hung on walls where people just pick them up or go to feel them. A patient who is especially upset and perhaps 'acting out', may be gradually distracted by a quilt put in his lap. Therefore make sure your quilt has lots of excitement for fingers. Make it strong and safe, so nothing will come off and choke a patient, so nothing will harm someone whipped by a quilt, and so it will stand up to patient abuse and harsh washing.

## Designing the Quilt

1. Select fabric with your fingers, not your eyes. Texture of the fabrics makes the touch quilt.
  - **Quilts should have at least 10 different textures:** smooth, rough, raised stripes or circles, nap, plush, pile or shag, satiny, burlap-like, homespun, lacy, tweedy, terry cloth, soft, hard, etc, etc, etc.
  - Try to use some **fake fur or minky** in each quilt. Most fabrics are okay. Not acceptable are fiberglass, real fur and real leather.
  - Dementia patients appreciate attractive, brightly coloured quilts in the primary colors - red, blue, and green. Neutral colours like beiges seem better for autistic people. As our sight dims, bright colors, contrasting edges, and larger patterns help. Red is a good choice for patients who are losing their eye sight. Therefore recommend that every quilt should include red.

### Notes:

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.

2. When laying out the blocks to design the quilt, think about the patterns of texture. You may, for example, alternate smoother squares with rough (as you might light and dark colors). Or do you want a progression of smooth to rough, soft to harsh around the quilt? When you have arranged squares, close your eyes and feel how they go together.

3. After you have a design of texture, look at the colors. Is the quilt too bland? too jarring? If you want to change a fabric because of color, look for a similar texture in another color. If you feel your quilt is too dull, you might add color by using bright regular quilt fabric to make a couple of toys or a place to quilt added textures.
4. Add embellishments as described in the next sections. Do not over embellish. A too-busy quilt detracts from the calming effect.
5. **For thread, use the strongest you have.** As these quilts maybe treated roughly and washed in commercial washing machines, they need to be as strong as possible. Therefore strong sewing threads are recommended. For embellishments which can be pulled swing on buttons use heavy duty button sewing thread, waxed dental floss, or even string as well as repeated stitching for attaching buttons etc.
6. A **middle layer** can be added. Batting is not suggested as it will make the quilt too hot for recipients. Flannelette can be added if you want to add body to the quilt.
7. The **backing** can also be a textured fabric. But it should not be a slipper fabric as many Alzheimer patients are in wheel chairs and a slippery fabric would cause the quilt to slide off their laps.

## Making the Quilt

1. Wash all fabrics and embellishments for top, back and, if using, middle (except batting). This step is necessary to control shrinkage in the finished quilt.
2. Quilts can be composed of squares or rectangles. What is important is a variety of textures (at least 10 different textures) and the size of the block (at least 6" X 6" [15 X15 cm] in area- average hand size).

**Squares:** The square blocks can vary from 6, 7 or 8" [15,17,20 cm] in size when finished and with a requirement of a minimum of 10 textures, this can give an overall quilt size of 24 to 32 square inches [155 to 205cm square]. The 16 squares in this quilt design leave plenty of room for textural variety.



**Rectangles:** Again use the guide of a minimum of 10 different textures and a minimum size of 6" X 6" [15 X15 cm] for hand area. As this is more challenging to assemble, you may want to create rows of different size rectangles to simplify the sewing.



3. Cut your blocks. Accurate cutting is important.
4. At this point sew securely any embellishments which will go in the seam allowance or on the block itself.
5. Sew the blocks together using a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " [6mm] seam allowance.
6. Press each seam allowances in order to tame some of the more resilient fabrics. Use pressing cloth as needed to protect heat-sensitive fabrics.
7. When joining two heavy fabrics, it may be easier/neater to press seam allowances open rather than to one side. Keep track of the way you want your seam allowances to go so they butt nicely when joining rows. Then press the seam allowance well in that direction before you cross it with another seam. Pressing carefully and intelligently will do wonders for how your fabrics fit together.
8. Press the entire quilt top flat and true.
9. Trim outside edges to make top square and edges even, if necessary.
10. To complete the quilt assembly, use a pillowcase technique to assemble the layers (top, backing and filling if one has been added) together.

See YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=bwBv2vjPCHc>

**Notes:**

- Cut the backing about two inches larger than the top (gives an extra inch all around). If you are using a middle layer (batting) cut it about an inch larger than the backing.

- If you want to add noise to the quilt, sew an 8 to 10 inch square [51 to 64.5 cm square] piece of strong foil or plastic wrapped material somewhere onto the center of the middle or the wrong side of the top – it should be inside, unseen (see section on noise).
  - Add straps when the quilt will be put on a vertical surface. Cut two 4" X 9" [10cm X 23cm] pieces from regular quilting fabric. Fold in half the long way, wrong sides together, and press. Press long raw edges into center. Press again. Stitch closed along folded edges and three more times 1/4" [6.3cm] apart. Fold in half. Lay and pin with raw ends 1/4" [6.3cm] outside top about 3" [7.5cm] from corner of top.
  - Leave an 8" [20cm] opening for turning. The opening should be on a firm fabric.
11. Quilting the quilt first starting with the center seams, machine quilt in the ditch along all seams in the top.
  12. Sew around the quilt 1/4" [6.3cm] from edge. Make sure this sewing has closed the 8" [20cm] opening you used for turning the quilt. If it has not, whip stitch the opening closed.
  13. Quilt inside the blocks as you like. Use the quilting to emphasize the texture where possible. Quilting enhances the touch quality of the quilt: don't skimp. The absolute minimum is an X across each square: quilt diagonally from corner to corner each way. This results in skimpy quilting, okay only if fabric is thickish or on 5 or 6 squares.

## **Troubleshooting for Fabrics of Mixed Weight and Texture**

All fabric must be washed before cutting. This is essential with mixed fabrics which shrink differently from one another.

In no particular order:

1. Stabilize stretchy or flimsy fabrics with iron-on interfacing before cutting.
2. Back light-weight or slippery fabrics with interfacing, muslin or flannelette.

3. Cut fake furs and piles from the **back** of the material.
  - With sharp scissors shave the pile of fake fur from the backing in the seam allowance. If your clipping is a bit rough it will not show.
  - Finger press the pile away from the edge, towards the center, before you pin and sew. If, after sewing, too much pile is caught in the stitching, pull it back with a pin, needle or crochet hook.
  - Use a walking foot, if you have one.
4. If fabric rolls in front of the presser foot, push down on it with your fingers as it goes under the presser foot. Be very careful not to get fingers under the presser foot or needle.
5. With some fabric combinations it matters which fabric is next to the feed dogs of your machine. If you have trouble getting the seams even, try turning your work over to sew it. Try to keep seam allowances to 1/4" [.63 cm]. However, if that is too difficult, cut fabric larger and adjust the seam allowance so that the finished block size remains constant.
6. Do lots of pinning. Baste if necessary.
7. Cutting out corners of seam allowances at intersections will help reduce bulk and help the quilt lay flat. Cut only fabric, not stitching, of the seam allowance.



**Be patient and fuss a little to get things right.**