

When the Body Remembers.

The Quiet Power of Movement in Dementia.

By Larry Carlson, Advisor with Landis Communities

Joan takes her mother's hand as they step through the door. "Let's go see the butterflies," she says gently.

Ellen pauses for a moment at the threshold. There's a flicker of hesitation—uncertainty about what's next, or even why. Joan doesn't rush her. She simply stays there, hand in hand, waiting.

A staff member nearby catches Joan's eye and offers a quiet smile—no interruption, just presence.

Then Ellen steps forward.

They move slowly down the path toward the garden. At first, each step feels tentative. Uneven. But as they continue, something begins to settle. The rhythm of walking takes over. The steps become a little more natural.

A butterfly drifts past.

Ellen's gaze follows it. And for a moment, something in her expression softens—recognition, or maybe just presence.

They keep walking. They don't talk much. They don't need to.

But something is happening.

We often think of movement as something we do to stay in shape. But in a dementia-friendly environment, it becomes something more. Movement supports the brain as much as the body.

It improves blood flow.

It helps regulate mood.

It can even slow the progression of cognitive decline.

And just as importantly—it brings a sense of calm.

The rhythm of walking, the repetition of motion, the feeling of being upright and moving forward... all of it can quiet the internal noise that so often accompanies cognitive change. What we sometimes describe as agitation or confusion is often a response to distress or overwhelm. Movement helps settle that.

At Landis Communities, this understanding is reflected in Lumina, where team members across the organization are equipped to recognize moments like these—not as problems to fix, but as opportunities to support. A walk isn't just a walk. It's a way to meet someone where they are, and gently draw out what is still there.



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Over the years, I've seen what happens when movement becomes intentional—even late in life. I've worked with individuals in their 90s who began a simple, guided strength routine. Over the course of a few months, their leg strength increased dramatically—far beyond what most people would expect at that age.

But the real win wasn't in the change in numbers. It was in how they moved through their day. Their steps became steadier. Their posture more upright. Their confidence more visible.

And with that came something deeper—a sense of ease. Because when the body feels more stable, the brain has less to manage.

Less fear of falling.

Less hesitation.

Less internal stress.

Strength, in that sense, becomes more than physical. It becomes a form of reassurance. Even in the presence of memory loss, the body retains an incredible capacity to respond.

It can still adapt.

It can still grow stronger.

It can still learn.

And in that process, something meaningful is preserved.

Not just mobility.

Not just balance.

But a sense of connection—to self, to environment, to the moment.

So maybe it starts with something simple – a walk to see the butterflies. Not as exercise.

Not as a task to complete. But as a way back.

Back to rhythm.

Back to steadiness.

Back to a quieter mind... and a more grounded sense of being.

Because even when memory begins to fade, the body still remembers.

