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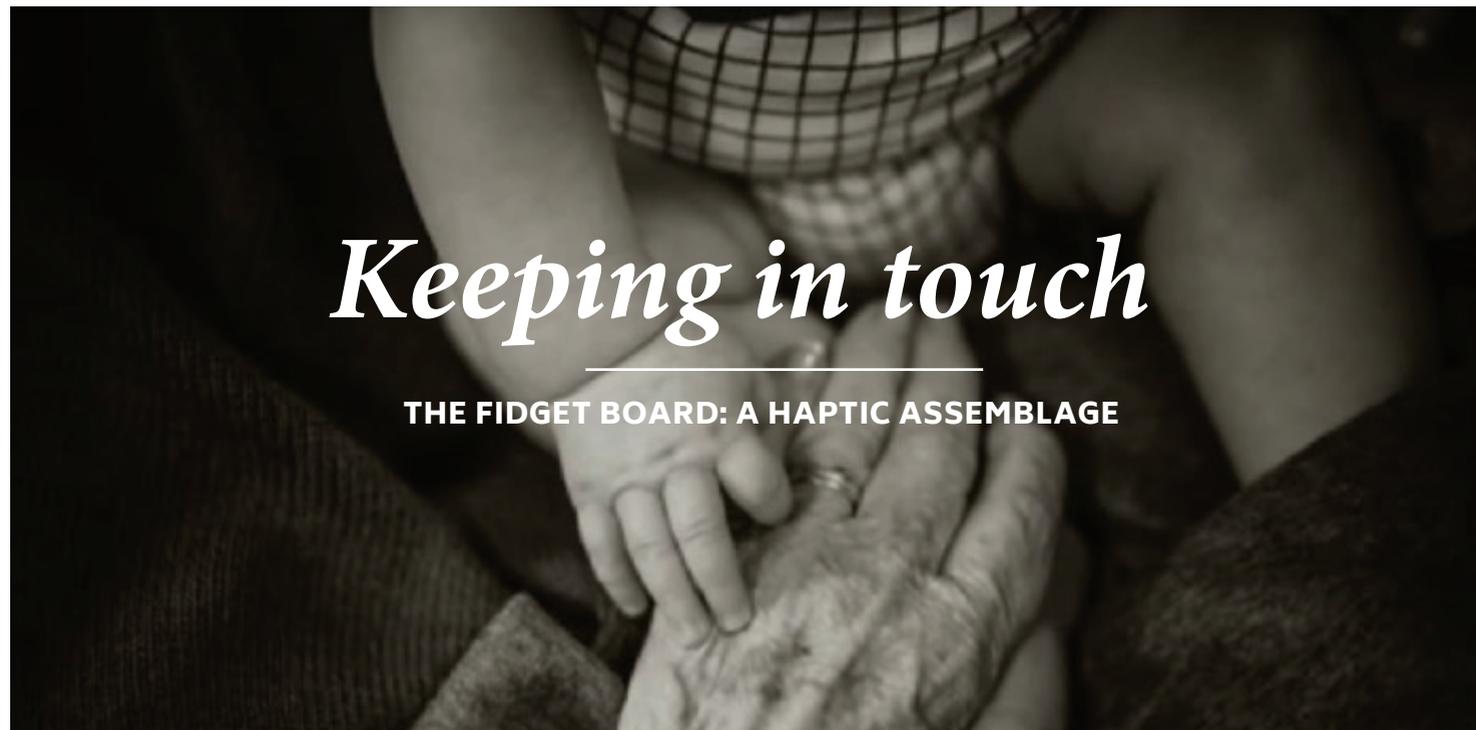
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## FIDGET PLAY

For many of us, touch is an intrinsic sensation. We twiddle our thumbs, letting our fingers run through things and surfaces in search of tactile delight. In this chapter, we explore fidgeting as a productive, therapeutic activity.



# Keeping in touch

## THE FIDGET BOARD: A HAPTIC ASSEMBLAGE

Throughout our lives as human beings, we use the sense of touch to soothe, comfort, and reassure. We can see this in the calming effect that touch has for both mother and infant—communicating emotions that transcend speech. For many adults, excess of stress and anxiety can be relieved through a “mindful” tactility, re-centering the body through the stimulus of the fingertips against textured surfaces. The power of this should not surprise us. After all, each fingertip contains more than 3000 nerve receptors that send signals to the brain!

Tactility can benefit dementia, also, in many ways. A 2010 study, for example, showed tactile massage appearing to reduce the rate of cognitive decline among adults with “severe” dementia. Carers, meanwhile, have broadly observed the soothing effects of texture through fidgeting, passive stimulus

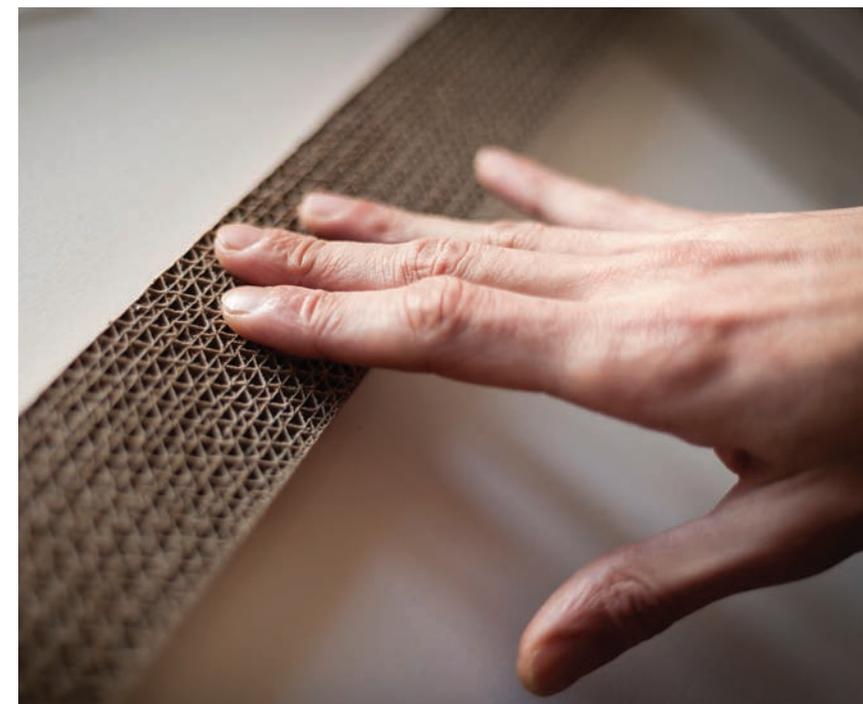
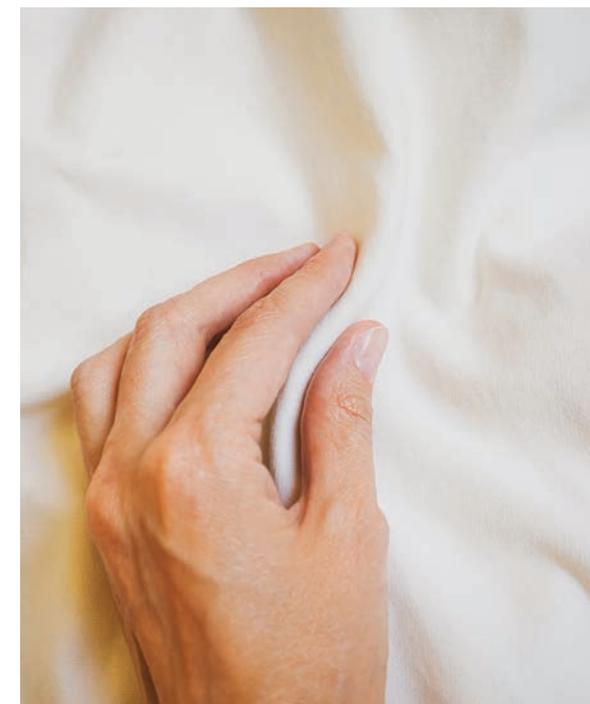
via fingers, and the like. The feelings of anxiety or discomfort at multiple stages of cognitive decline can be alleviated via a thoughtful use of touch.

At the same time, tactile activities can be used to lessen boredom, and provide interest, during moments in which carers have responsibilities—such as laundry, or meal preparation—which necessarily lead to periods of limited social interaction. These may be combined with other sensory media, such as music, as well.

Luckily, tactile surfaces (such as so-called “fidget-boards” and “fidget blankets”) are easy to hack, and may be customised in infinite ways. These can be assembled using basic hand-tools, or simple sewing skills—making them an easily-accessible amenity for carers to rely upon.

While the possibilities are endless, there are a few common types:

“**Finger-tracing**” elements produce paths that a finger can follow, linking tactile stimulus to direction and path-finding—linking hand and eye to negotiate a specific cognitive task, or passively running a finger across a circuit of string or other linear textile. Tracing boards can be created using a range of base surfaces. They can be built on a cushion or throw-pillow, or a blanket. For an example of something firmer, we’ve shown a standard kitchen chopping board. As variety is an important source of renewable stimulation, you may want to hack together multiple, using the opportunities of different materials for a range of experiences. Elements to trace are often linear: twine, threads, edgings, or even “dashed lines” of buttons or ornaments.



**Moving parts**, such as beads, can likewise provide a range of tactile experiences. These work best when following a string or wire, like a rosary or Buddhist meditation bracelet. Because beads are available in a wide array of sizes and materials, these may stimulate visual senses as well. Fidget surfaces may include a collection of any small items chosen for their tactile qualities—however, loose items (such as marbles) should be avoided due to ingestion or choking hazards. Small curtain elements that can be drawn, or flaps that can be lifted, are interesting mobile options to explore as well.

Other boards can take advantage of small **functional units**: zippers, bolt-locks, laces to tie, et cetera. These provide a clear challenge as well as tactile feedback. Individual buttons, keypads, or calculators can also add a gratifying response to a push—as well as some sound connecting touch to hearing.

Functions may vary in challenge, exercising fine motor skills that can fall into disuse in times of cognitive impairment (when they are less frequently tested). These can also recall tasks performed prior to the onset of dementia, stimulating memories of repeated activities from work or life.

However, tactile stimulation can arise from the **properties of a material itself**, and can be added simply to the arms of a chair (such as Poang!) in order to provide a “worry” surface for the fingers to stroke and experience. “Shag” or deep carpet, for example, can be very effective for this purpose, due to its tufts or tendrils. Patches of this, often available free of charge via carpet shops, can be sewn or glued onto existing furniture. Meanwhile, textiles such as corduroy or felt can provide different types of feedback to the nerves of the fingers, soothing mental stress or tension. It may be advisable to make multiple textures available to the user—contrasting smooth finishes (such as plastic) with knitted, indented or blistered ones (such as bubble wrap or natural cloth).

As a wealth of materials and functional items are available in the market, many cheaply or for free, we would encourage carers to source for many—to see which ones lead to a positive response, either singly or in combination. Fabric and DIY / crafting outlets are an excellent source, as well as IKEA and home-supply and hardware shops. Existing household items can find a new life as “up-cycled” elements to be attached to a fidget board (old calculators, laces, soft toys, or brushes are all great examples). Many other useful materials come as packaging from e-commerce delivery services. At the same time, some highly tactile items, such as “bump-ons” and leather-repair patch kits, come with built-in adhesive patches and can be easily added to the arms of chairs or sofas.

Adding tactile resources to an environment is (as with so many aspects of dementia care) a process of

experiment. Certainly, some items are more effectively suited to particular degrees of cognitive decline than others. But it is important to bear in mind that the sense of touch can provide therapeutic options for almost everyone, cognitively impaired or not, at many stages of life—and remains a helpful strategy with demonstrated psycho-social benefits.

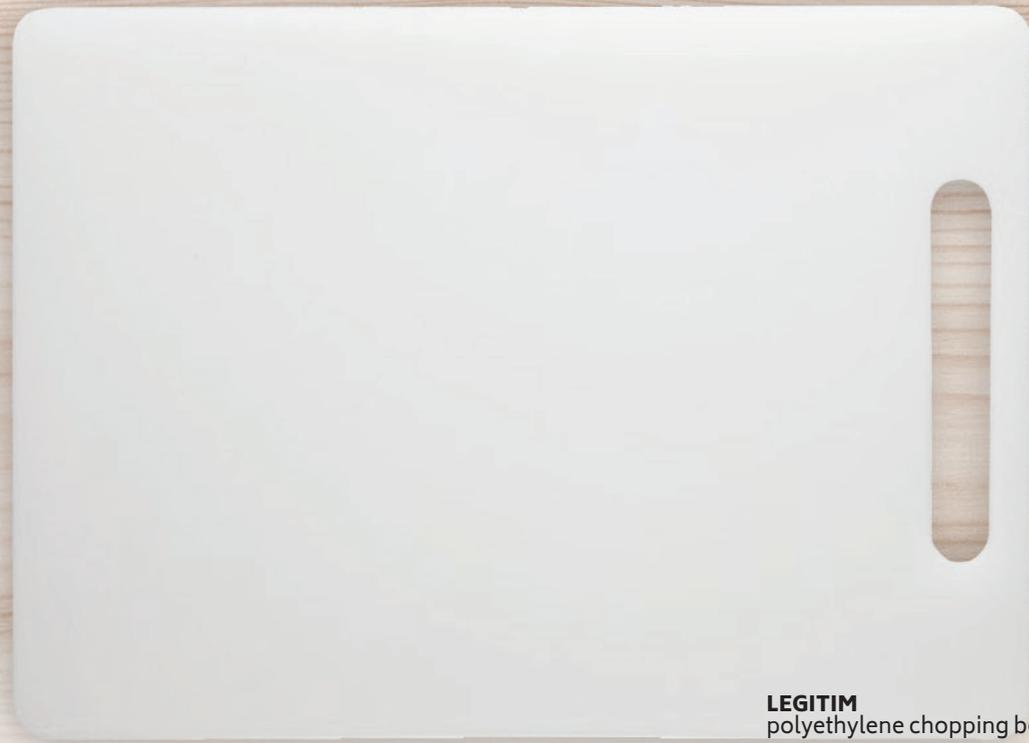
**DO** combine items of different tactility, size, and visual appearance; combine multiple activities on a single fidget board or blanket; reuse outdated or excess household items.

**DON'T** use small or unsecure items at risk of ingestion or choking hazard; use glue or epoxy to affix items to the fidget surface; use sharp items or elements that may pinch.



Combine items of different tactility, size and visual appearances. Even soft fabrics can vary in texture. Try sewing them together into a patchwork quilt.

## From chopping board...

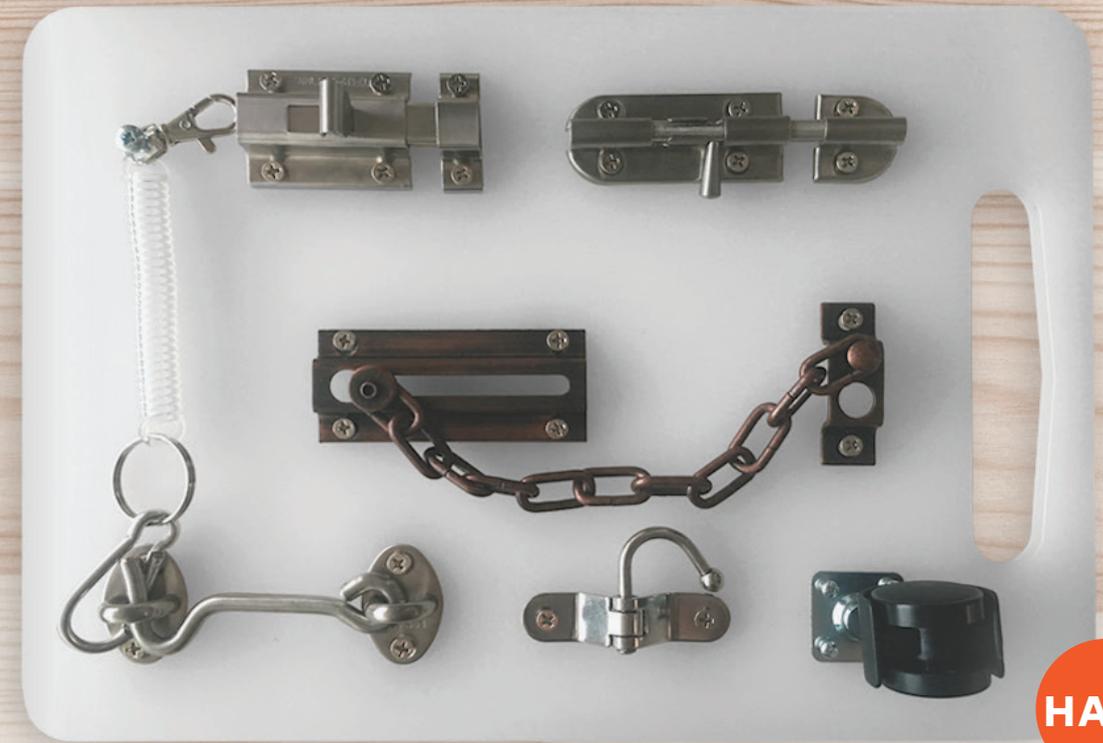


LEGITIM  
polyethylene chopping board

**\$2.90**

The basic parts of the fidget board are simple, affordable and accessible. A cheap polyethelene chopping board offers an easy-to-clean surface to which simple found objects can be attached, creating tactile exercises for restless fingers.

## ...to fidget board



**HACK**

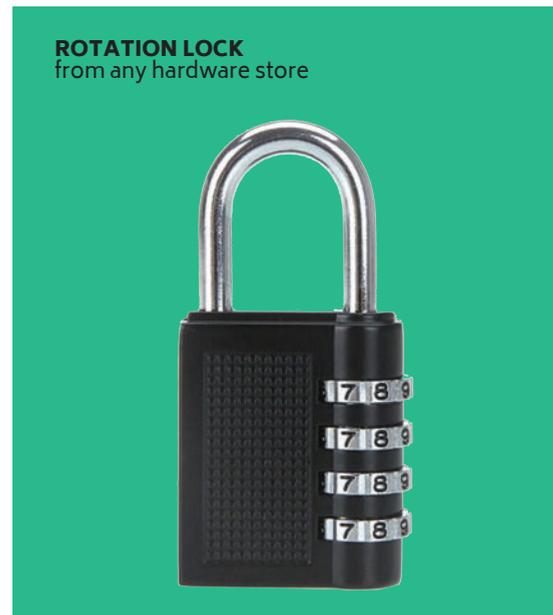


It doesn't have to be pristine. You can recycle old locks and trinkets for your new fidget boards.

# Working with familiar objects



Padlocks are easy to grab and hold, and their shapes conjure tactile familiarity. Most care recipients would have lived through the daily ritual of handling and unlocking similar padlocks throughout their lives.



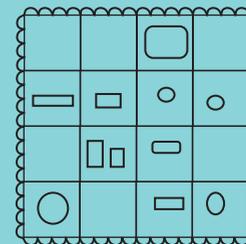
⤴ Other kinds of padlocks like those with numbers and alphabets are a chance to give the fingers a work-out. Numbers and alphabets also promote cognitive activity.



Pick a board surface that can be easily cleaned and scrubbed. Doing so removes germs and ensures a clean and hygienic experience for the fidget board user. To really get rid of germs, wipe the surfaces regularly with alcohol-based sanitisers.

# Soft and gentle to touch

We know that soft surfaces are comforting and gentle to touch. We also know that finger activities like knitting — where fingers hold an instrument and move purposefully with yarn — are a therapeutic exercise. We bring both ideas together in the fidget blanket, tapping into finger activity as a form of therapy.



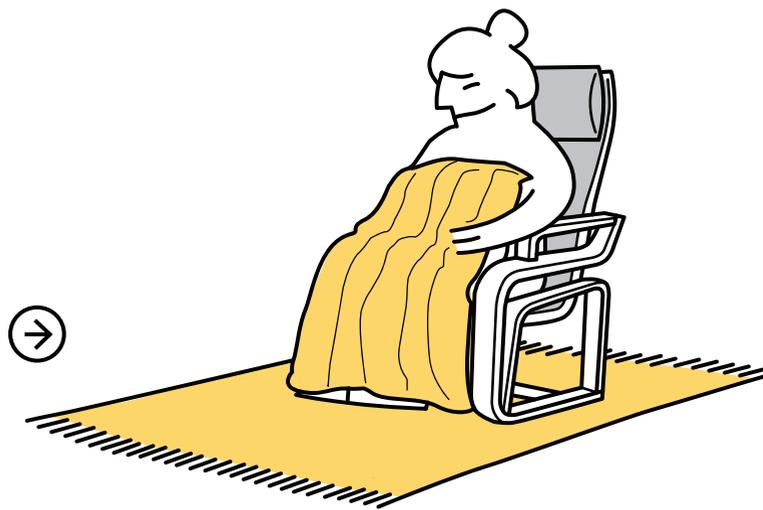
## Fidget Blanket

Quilted cotton blanket with sewn-on pockets and objects

For additional options or assembly instructions, see [www.hackcare.sg](http://www.hackcare.sg)



The sensation of a covering blanket or a rug under one's feet evokes warmth and cosiness.



# The joy of fidgeting

Holding, grabbing, running one's fingers across soft or textured surfaces are exercises that offer tactile delight. They help to release nervous energy and calm the mind.



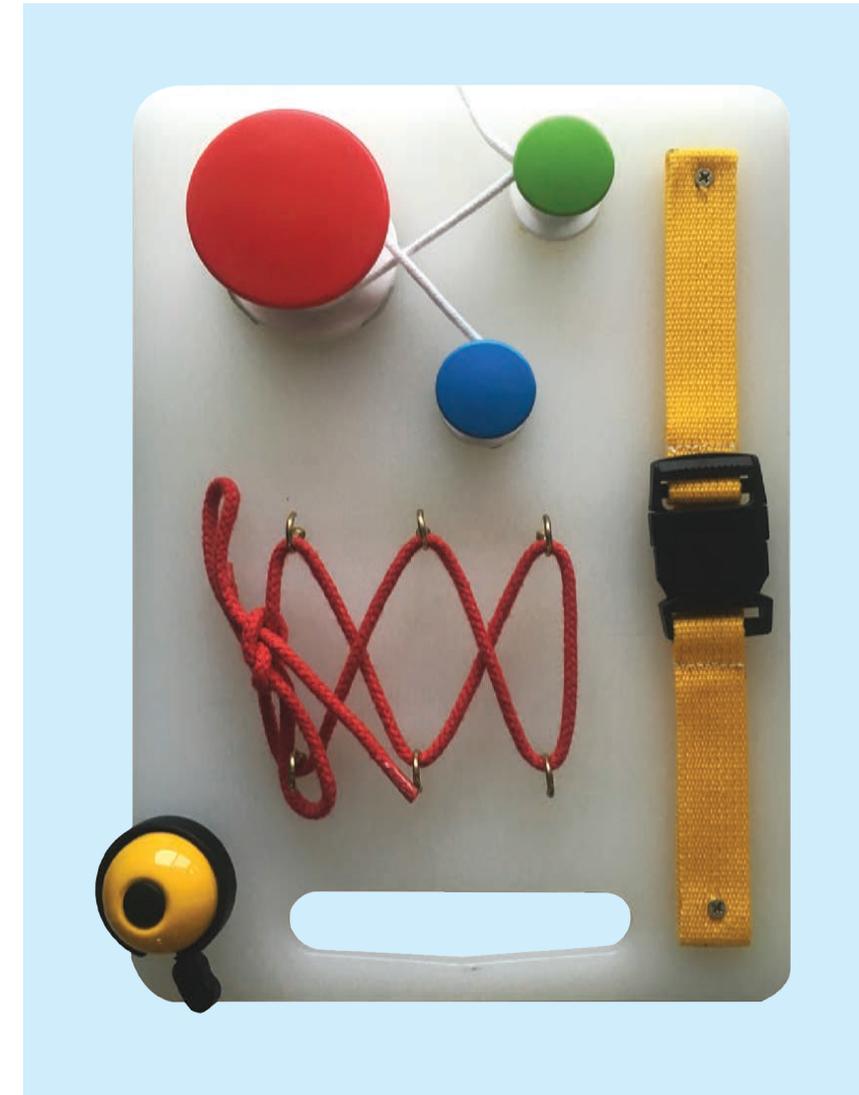
- 01 Touch** is intrinsic to the human need for intimacy.  
**02 Fabrics** are delightful to hold.  
**03 Tiny buttons** offer moments of tactile surprise on fidget fabrics.



**DIY FIDGET CLOTH**  
get creative with everyday objects



Having different objects with different colours on the fidget board allows for varied tactile experiences to stimulate and engage the care recipient.



## FAMILIAR TO THE TOUCH



The touch and feel of familiar objects from one's past rekindles memories of bygone days. Use these items to create a rich fidget board experience.



# Build it yourself

Anyone can make a fidget board out of anything. The beauty of it lies in its sheer variety of possibilities. Follow a few simple steps to craft a board that is customised to the care recipient's needs.

All fidget boards start with a base. Hard or soft, big or small; the choice of base determines its character. Then come the objects – textured, coloured, durable, delightful. If carefully curated and paired, they go a long way towards making a long-lasting and well-loved fidget board.

**01 Personal tools from your toolbox.**

If you don't have them, ask a friend or neighbour – they'll be glad to oblige.

**02 Padlock from your local supply store.**

Familiar found objects, like locks and latches, are common and effective.

**03 Board & other objects.**

# Bases come in all shapes and sizes.

It's up to your imagination, and it's all about what Lucy feels when she holds its edges. Smooth, round, textured, small, large — pick one that is right for her.

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**CHOPPING BOARD**  
small, plastic

**\$19.50**

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**Hard surfaces** train motor skills: pushing, pulling, twisting. A strong, flat surface is a must, but may be more difficult to transport.

**01 Large wooden chopping board** Well textured, but tough to bring around.

**02 Small plastic chopping board** Light, easy to wash, but may lack tactility.

**03 Lozenge chopping board** Rounded edges are safer and feel better in the hand.

**04 Rubberised board** Rubber or silicone is safe and washable, at the cost of texture.

**05 Clipboard** Travel boards can be repurposed out of lighter material.

**06 Cake base** Virtually anything can be a board — be creative!

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**COTTON BAG**  
stitch objects into the lining

**\$15.90**

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**Soft surfaces** stimulate, relax, and are gentle to the touch of the hand.

**07 Cotton blanket** Warm, comforting, and large.

**08 Cloth throw** Thin and foldable, easy to wash.

**09 Pillow** Thick and soft, but hard to bring outdoors.

**10 Purse** Good for fidget play on the go.

**11 Cotton bag** Stitch objects into the lining.



**01 PLASTIC COILED LANYARD**  
from any stationery store

**\$0.50/ea**

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Pick objects with inviting, varied textures, but limit yourself to 4 or 5 colours. Contrast helps the care recipient differentiate quickly and easily between different surfaces and objects.

- 01 Blue plastic coiled lanyard** Thin, flexible, manipulable.
- 02 Plastic switch** Neutral texture, distinct shape.
- 03 Brass hinge** Hard, cold, metallic surface.
- 04 Felt squares** Soft, warm, pleasant to touch.

Find objects that are washable or replaceable. They are often from the bath or kitchen section. You can pair and select these objects based on their washability.

- 01 Trimmed rubber placemat** Stain- and spill-resistant.
- 02 Wooden spoon** Removable and machine-washable in event of dirt.
- 03 Silicone safe-grab mat** Can be wiped down with a wet cloth to clean.



**01 SILICONE SAFE-GRAB MAT**  
local home supply stores

**\$3.50/ea**

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## Objects for fidgety fingers



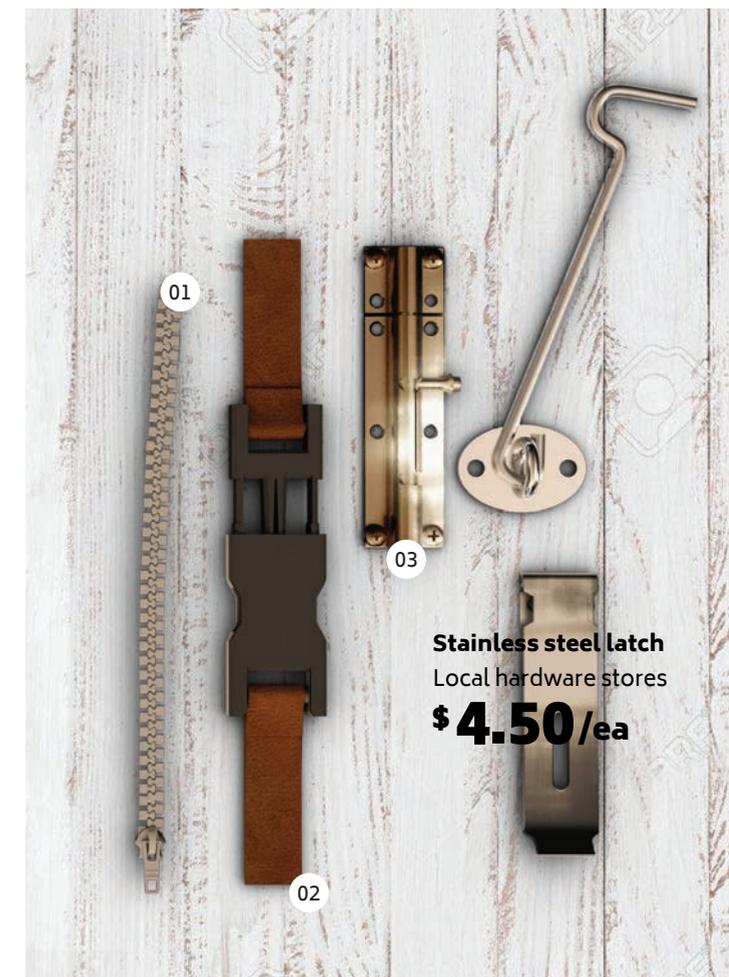
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Let Lucy practise her motor skills with familiar objects, like latches or locks of varying size, shape, and interactivity.

- 01 Locks, various types** Numerical, padlock, latches.
- 02 Remote control** Small buttons to push or prod.
- 03. Handles, various types** Choice of knobs, levers.



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**Stainless steel latch**  
Local hardware stores

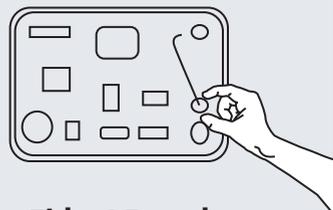
**\$4.50/ea**

Soft, malleable, or fabric items can be easily sewn on to blankets. Hard items are better suited for boards. Avoid objects that are bulky or heavy.

- 01 Zipper with fabric base** Ideal for sewing onto fidget blanket.
- 02 Belt buckle with trimmed cotton belt** Stitch belt ends to blanket.
- 03. Deadbolt, latches** Comes with predrilled holes — easy to install.

# Solid & reliable

This tried-and-tested board is ideal for putting those fine motor skills into practice. Its component parts are easily available from your local hardware store.



## Fidget Board

Wooden board with mounted tactile objects.

For additional options or assembly instructions, see [www.hackcare.sg](http://www.hackcare.sg)

- 01 APTITLIG chopping board From IKEA.
- 02 Plastic light switch From any hardware shop.
- 03 Deadbolt
- 04 On-off switch
- 05 Number lock
- 06 Key lock
- 07 Baggage lock Doesn't have to be TSA-approved.
- 08 Chain bolt
- 09 Latch





Add interactive widgets, like zips or laces as playful options. Bonus, they train motor skills too.

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**FIDGET QUILT**  
patchwork cotton quilt

**\$ 29.<sup>90</sup>**

- 01 **Silicone widget** From IKEA.
- 02 **Plastic coiled lanyard** From any stationery shop.
- 03 **Leather belt** From your closet.
- 04 **Zipper** From old jeans or a craft store.
- 05 **Shoelace** From an old pair of shoes.
- 06 **Felt and leather patches** Bits and pieces of unused fabrics.
- 07 **OMTÅNKSAM** From IKEA.
- 08 **Ribbon** From a craft store.

## Softly touch it

This patchwork quilt is equal parts comforting and convenient — just stitch on an array of soft, flexible items to round the fidget blanket off.

## Do-It-Yourself, with family

Now that you've got the basics covered in this chapter, you're ready to start building your own fidget board or blanket. Involve the whole family in the fun of making.



## GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

FIDGET PURSE  
portable fidgeting  
**\$5.90**



- 01 Purse From a local trinket store.
- 02 Buttons From a craft store.
- 03 Denim fabric From an old pair of jeans.
- 04 Iron-on felt patch From a craft store.
- 05 Carabiner From an outdoor sports store.
- 06 Plastic Coiled Lanyard From a stationery store.