

Holidays & Dementia

Tips for caregivers and loved ones

While holidays are a joyous time for many families, they can be challenging for families affected by Alzheimer's or dementia. Learn strategies to make your holidays run smoothly.



Prepare the person living with dementia

- Talk about and show photos of family members and friends who will be visiting.
- Have a "quiet" room in case things get too hectic.
- Play familiar music and serve favorite meals.
- Schedule naps/rest periods.
- Schedule family and friend visit times and/or in smaller numbers.
- Consider having multiple holiday meals with smaller groups of people instead of larger gatherings.

Involve the person living with dementia

- Ask him or her to help you prepare food, wrap packages, help decorate or set the table.
- Maintain the person's normal routine as much as possible, so that holiday preparations don't become disruptive or confusing.
- Build on traditions and experiment with new traditions that might be less stressful or a better fit with your caregiving responsibilities, such as watching seasonal movies.

Create a Safe Environment

- Keep decorations simple. Avoid "real" candles, artificial fruit/vegetables, or other edibles as decorations.
- Limit access to places where injury can occur such as the kitchen or stairwells.
- Supervise in taking necessary medications.
- Keep a list of emergency numbers and medications.
- Limit the availability of alcohol.
- Assign a "buddy" to watch out for the person to ensure their comfort.

Select activities everyone can do together

- Consider taking walks, icing cookies, telling stories, making a memory book or family tree.
- To encourage conversation, place magazines, scrapbooks, or photo albums in reach.
- Play music to prompt dancing or movement and upbeat moods.

Offer communication tips for family & friends

- Address the person by name and identify who you are by name.
- Be patient, supportive and a good listener.
- Maintain eye contact and allow time for their responses.
- Use short and simple phrases.
- Don't argue. Arguing can make things worse and could cause a behavior outburst.
- Avoid common phrases like, "Don't you remember?"

Adapt gift giving

- Provide people with suggestions for useful and enjoyable gifts for the person, such as an identification bracelet, or suggest comfortable, easy-to-remove clothing; favorite music; photo albums of family and friends; or favorite treats.
- If asked for gift ideas, you may want to suggest a gift certificate or something that will help make things easier, like house cleaning; lawn, laundry services; or food delivery gift cards.

Familiarize others with the situation

- The holidays are full of emotions, so it can help to let friends and family members know what to expect. You may find this easier to share changes in a letter or email that can be sent to multiple recipients. Here is an example:
- You may notice that ___ has changed since you last saw him/her. Among the changes you may notice are ___. I've enclosed a picture so you know how ___ looks now. Because ___ sometimes has problems remembering and thinking clearly, his/her behavior is a little unpredictable.

For additional tips visit alz.org.