



the compassion to care, the leadership to conquer

# HELPLINE HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER

## ***MANAGING THE HOLIDAYS***

Holidays can present special challenges to caregivers. In addition to the normal tasks of caregiving, holidays require additional tasks: gift shopping, wrapping, filling out and mailing holiday cards, baking special foods, and perhaps extra entertaining or responding to social invitations, which also means extra cleaning. When added to an already heavy load, these usually joyful tasks can simply become extra weight.

The holidays are times that most people expect to be happy, based upon our past experiences, and visualize the images of happy "home for the holidays" celebrations. But when the holidays do not match our expectations or past traditions, we are emotionally "set up" to feel disappointed or depressed.

## MANAGING THE HOLIDAYS (cont.)

Depending on how advanced your loved one's memory loss is, he or she may not be aware that it is a holiday, or may not remember family members in town for the holidays. It is very important for caregivers to prepare for the holidays by making a realistic assessment of what is manageable given the level of confusion and the care needs of your loved one.

Ask yourself "What do I need for the holidays?" "What parts of my usual holiday traditions are important for me to keep?" "Are there simpler ways of enjoying some of the things that are important to me?"

For example, if a certain food is essential to you, do you have to make it or can you purchase it somewhere? What traditions make you happiest and why? For instance, if you love ornaments, but not the messy tree, you may be just as happy hanging ornaments on a plant or all over the house.

Another consideration is what other family members will be around for the holidays and who else might be able to help with or carry out family traditions. For example, if in the past all the adult children come back to the parents' house to enjoy a special meal prepared by mother, and this year Mama has Alzheimer's, then perhaps this is the year that one of the children fixes dinner in Mama's home or has the family over to their house.

It is also important to consider what adjustments may have to be made in order to make a holiday even workable for a loved one with Alzheimer's. Is she at a point where a lot of stimulation upsets her? Is she able to follow conversations? Is he able to be socially appropriate (will he be around people where that is necessary)? Will she remember family members she hasn't seen for awhile (can cueing with photos ahead of time make a difference)? Is he still able to be around small children? Can he function in an unfamiliar setting? Is he still able to choose gifts for significant others? If not is it appropriate for someone else to do this for him? Is your home or are your family members' homes safe for your one? (For example, holly and mistletoe berries are poisonous if eaten.) Planning appropriately around these questions can avoid both embarrassment and disappointment... or worse.

Another important question: 'For whom have you designed your current holiday plans?' Sometimes caregivers do not celebrate the holidays at all

because the loved one doesn't know it is a holiday. In some instances this may relieve stress for the caregiver. Some caregivers may wish to go all out, and enjoy the enriching experience of the holidays although their loved one may not be able to fully appreciate the efforts.

Sometimes caregivers grow exhausted carrying out family traditions for the children, and are happy to relinquish some holiday activities to the next generation!

Consider this: When we do the things that are joyful for us we are able to spread that joy. What we can not do can wait for another year.

### GIFT-GIVING SUGGESTIONS

Here are a few suggestions for gifts for your loved one with memory loss. Choose gifts that reflect your loved one's interests and lifestyle.

- Tickets to a ball game (and an escort), home shows, boat shows, antique shows
- Recordings of old favorite tunes, video tapes of favorite TV shows or movies
- Lap robes-textured, interesting materials
- Comfortable tube socks or slippers
- Clothing: washable, comfortable, easy fasteners
- An identification bracelet
- A photo album recording fun family activities
- Costume jewelry, makeup, dress-up items if she likes to be dressed up
- Large print books, Coloring Books, a magazine or newspaper subscription
- Cuddly animals and dolls
- "Memory Book" chronicling his past interests achievements, work history, etc.
- Craft items which reflect her interests, functional level
- Short trips in the car
- Lots of affection



Some of our happiest memories are of holidays, yet during the holidays we are especially vulnerable to "holiday blues".

If depression has been an issue, we may have a more challenging time staying upbeat during the holidays.

Today there are many successful ways to treat depression. Everyone feels a little down sometimes, but be alert to feelings of sadness that don't go away, trouble enjoying things that have given you pleasure in the past, and feelings of chronic fatigue that cannot be explained.



## **BE ALERT TO SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION**

by Barbara Green, Connections Program Care Coordinator

Adapted from "Caregivers need to be Alerted to Symptoms of Depression", *Perspectives*, Vol. 18, No.1, Alzheimer's Association, Western and Central Washington State Chapter

Depression is the most under-diagnosed and under-treated mood disorder of the elderly. This applies to both healthy elderly as well as the patient with Alzheimer's disease. Keen observation is the key to the best method of diagnosing depression. This can be complicated by the fact that the symptoms of depression often resemble those of dementia; it becomes hard to recognize and isolate which part is the disease process of cognitive decline and brain impairment and which part is mood related.

Some of the physical symptoms of depression include:

- Weakness and low energy
- Changes in eating, appetite and weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Complaints of headaches, dizziness and diffuse or non-specific pain

Some of the psychological symptoms of depression include:

- Apathy and loss of interest and initiative
- Poor attention and concentration
- Loss of interest in personal care and grooming
- Weepiness and unending crying
- No longer taking pleasure in favorite activities.

In diagnosing depression, a clinician will ask how long symptoms have lasted. If the above cluster of symptoms have lasted for more than 2 weeks, and these symptoms have also begun to interfere with a person's daily life and ability to interact positively with others, treatment for clinical depression is indicated.

*For the person with Alzheimer's disease, treating depression is extremely important. Treatment can improve mood and function. Increasing function can help a person to continue with activities and provide opportunities for him or her to socialize. It can also make caregiving less demanding, and reduce the risk for the caregiver to become depressed!*

Both medication and providing a good balance of activities can be effective in treating depression. It's important to talk to your doctor if you notice your loved one has symptoms of depression. And remember, family caregivers are at extremely high risk for depression due to the stress, fatigue and isolation associated with the demanding tasks of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's.

Be sure to take care of yourself; give yourself respite time, be kind to yourself, find enjoyment in your leisure activities and find a support network!

## 101 ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO YEAR 'ROUND

1. Clip Coupons
2. Sort poker chips
3. Count tickets
4. Rake leaves
5. Use the carpet sweeper
6. Read out loud from:  
*Good Old Days*  
Box 428, Seabrook  
NH 03874-0428
7. Bake cookies
8. Look up names in the phone book
9. Read the daily paper out loud
10. Ask a friend or neighbor who has a baby or young child to visit
11. Listen to music
12. Plant seeds indoors or outside
13. Look at family photos
14. Toss a ball
15. Color pictures
16. Make homemade lemonade
17. Wipe off the table
18. Weed the flower bed
19. Make cream cheese mints:  
\*2 lbs powdered sugar  
\*8 oz. Cream cheese  
\*2 drops peppermint extract \*food coloring as desired  
\*Knead together and press into mint molds
20. Have a spelling bee
21. Read from:  
*The Reader's Digest Pleasantville, NY 10570*
22. Fold clothes
23. Have a neighbor or friend visit with a "calm" pet
24. Cut pictures out of greeting cards
25. Dress up fancy or fun
26. Bake homemade bread
27. Sort objects such as beads by shape or color
28. Sing Christmas carols
29. Say, "tell me more" when they start talking about a memory
30. Put silverware away
31. Make a valentine collage
32. Play favorite songs and sing together
33. Take a ride
34. Make a cherry pie
35. Read aloud from:  
*Ideals*  
P.O. Box 1101  
Milwaukee, Ws 53201
36. Dye Easter Eggs
37. Match a basket of socks
38. Take a ride
39. Make an apple pie
40. String cheerios to hang outside for the birds
41. Make a fresh fruit salad
42. Sweep the patio
43. Color paper shamrocks green
44. Fold towels
45. Have an afternoon tea
46. Remember great inventions
47. Play Pictionary
48. Paint a sheet
49. Cut out paper dolls
50. Identify states and capitols
51. Make a family tree poster
52. Color a picture of a flag
53. Cook hot dogs outside
54. Grow magic rocks
55. Water house plants
56. Reminisce about the first kiss
57. Play horse shoes
58. Dance
59. Sing favorite hymns
60. Make homemade ice cream
61. Force bulbs for winter blooming
62. Make Christmas cards
63. Sort playing cards by their color
64. Write a letter to a family member
65. Dress in red on football Saturdays
66. Pop popcorn
67. Name the presidents
68. Give a manicure
69. Make paper butterflies
70. Plant a tree
71. Make a May basket
72. Make homemade apple sauce
73. Finish famous sayings
74. Feed the ducks.
75. Mold with play dough
76. Look at pictures in a National Geographic  
*National Geographic Society*  
PO Box 2895  
Washington, DC. 2077-9960
77. Put a simple puzzle together
78. Sand wood
79. Rub on pleasant scented hand lotion  
(continued bottom of p. 6)

## HOLIDAY VISITING

The holiday season is a time for visiting and reconnecting with family, friends and neighbors. Sometimes this season can be sad or stressful for those caring for a loved one who is memory impaired.

The hints below are our gift to you as we wish you an enjoyable holiday season.

- Holidays can be meaningful, enriching times for both the person with dementia and family. Maintaining (or adapting) old family rituals and traditions helps all family members feel a sense of belonging and family identity. For a person with Alzheimer's or a related illness, this link with a familiar past is reassuring and builds self-esteem.

- Set your own limits early, and be clear about them with others. You do not have to live up to the expectations of friends or relatives. Your situation is different now.



- Encourage family and friends to visit even if it is painful for them. Keep the number of people visiting at one time to a minimum, or try a few visitors, visiting quietly with your loved one in a separate room. Most individuals with Alzheimer's will be okay for brief periods of time if they have adequate private rest in between visits.

- Try some simple holiday preparation with your loved one several days ahead. Just observing you doing holiday preparations will familiarize him/her with the upcoming festivities. Helping you in your preparations is a way of sharing in the pleasure of the experience of giving as well as the fun of anticipation and reminiscing.

- Try to avoid situations that further confuse or frustrate:
  - Crowds of people who expect your loved one to remember them
  - Noise, conversations or loud music
  - Strange or different surroundings
  - Changes in light intensity – too light or too dark
  - Overindulgence in rich or special food or drink (especially alcohol)
  - Change in regular routine and sleep patterns

- Prepare in advance a few quiet distractions (a family photo album or a simple repetitive chore like cracking nuts) to use if the patient becomes upset or over stimulated.

- Try scheduling activities, especially some outdoor exercise early in the day to avoid holiday fatigue. Holiday music, story-telling, singing or church services (even on TV) may be especially enjoyable.

**FOR A LITTLE EXTRA SUPPORT IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON...**

**CALL THE ALZHEIMER'S HELPLINE!**

If you need help or have questions in between Caregiver Group meetings, or have difficulty getting out to meetings, call the HELPLINE at 206-363-5500 or 1-800-848-7097.

Information and support are available through the HELPLINE 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays!

## A FEW MORE HOLIDAY HINTS

### ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

Discuss holiday celebrations with relatives and close friends. Call a face-to-face meeting or arrange for a long-distance conference call to discuss major holiday celebrations. Make sure that family members understand the situation and have realistic expectations. By discussing past celebrations, you may be able to agree on how you'll handle upcoming holidays.

Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably manage. No one can expect you to maintain every holiday tradition or event. If you've always invited 15-20 people to your home, consider inviting 5 for a simple meal. Also consider asking others to bring dishes for a "potluck" meal or to host the meal at their home.

You may wish to familiarize others with the situation by composing a letter to explain changes in your household since the last holiday celebration and to prepare them for changes in your family member with memory loss.

### BE FLEXIBLE

Consider celebrating over a lunch or brunch, rather than an evening meal, to work around the evening confusion or sundowning that sometimes affects people with Alzheimer's. Also consider serving nonalcoholic drinks and keeping the room bright.

Prepare to deal with your post-holiday letdown. You may want to arrange for in-home care so you can enjoy a movie or lunch with a friend and reduce post-holiday stress.

*Remember* that holidays are opportunities to share time with the people you love. Try to make these celebrations easy on yourself and the person with Alzheimer's disease so that you may concentrate on enjoying your time together.

*Adapted from "Holidays", Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association, Inc, 1992. All rights reserved.*



### 101 ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO YEAR 'ROUND (continued from p. 4)

80. Decorate paper placemats
81. Arrange fresh flowers
82. Remember famous people
83. Straighten the underwear drawer
84. Finish nursery rhymes
85. Make peanut butter sandwiches
86. Wipe off the patio furniture
87. Cut up used paper for scratch paper
88. Take care of a fish tank
89. Trace and cut out leaves
90. Ask simple trivia questions
91. Finish Bible quotes
92. Paint with string
93. Make a collage out of pictures
94. Read classic short stories
95. Put coins into a jar
96. Sew sewing cards
97. Put bird feed out for birds
98. Clean out a pumpkin
99. Reminisce about a favorite summer
100. Roll yarn into a ball
101. Make a birthday cake

By Susan Lonn,  
Madonna Adult Day Services  
Lincoln, Nebraska  
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