

Gift Ideas for the Holidays...and Any Other Day

For the person with Alzheimer's disease

People with Alzheimer's disease, like the rest of us, are individuals, and gifts should be chosen with their known preferences in mind. Here are some ideas to get your holiday gift list started:

Early stage: People with early stage Alzheimer's disease probably still have good communication skills, are rather active, and are trying hard to maintain their independence for as long as possible. Gifts to encourage and enhance these abilities include

- Tickets to a concert, musical, sporting event, etc.
- Favorite homemade frozen meals that can be reheated
- Fruit basket, cookies or candy (if diet allows)
- Memory book or memory box of person's history and family
- Photo album with names and dates next to each picture
- Electric coffeepot, which turns itself off after a short time
- Day planner to keep track of appointments
- ID bracelet through the Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return program
- Trip to a mall or shopping center, topped off with lunch
- Medication holders with times to signal when doses are due
- Costume jewelry
- Familiar games, playing cards
- Wipe-off message board
- Tape or CD of favorite music
- Indoor golf putter and return
- Regular visits – to talk, listen, play a game

Middle stage: The person's attention span may be shorter, and she may have some difficulty communicating and may need help with daily activities. Choose gifts that focus on remaining abilities.

- Taped religious services
- Aquarium with fish
- Video or pictorial book of a favorite subject (historical places, celebrities, nature, animals, sports, travel, etc.)
- Easy to manage clothing (tube socks, slippers with Velcro, pull-on pants, warm-up suits, and more)
- Night lights

- Tape or CD of favorite music
- Larger piece puzzles (adult appropriate, please)
- Something soft and cuddly
- BAAG (Bag of Alzheimer Activities and Games, available from the Alzheimer's Association, WV Chapter)
- Gift certificate to hair salon or for manicure
- Chair exercise video
- Materials to sort (for sensory stimulation)
- Bathroom safety devices
- Short trips to familiar places

Late stage: There is a diminished capacity to deal with anything complicated in the later stage of Alzheimer's disease. Gifts should stimulate the senses, maintain the person's dignity, and provide a sense of security.

- Bird feeder (set up near favorite window)
- Tape or CD of favorite music, soothing music, or nature sounds
- Personal items (lotion, hairbrush, Kleenex or handkerchiefs, nail polish, after shave, light perfume or cologne)
- Lap robe, shawl, afghan, or warm footwear
- Visits from well-behaved pets
- Hand or body massage
- Snow globe/music box
- Blooming plants (check for allergies)

Some gifts recommended for one stage of the disease may be appropriate for other stages as well. For instance, a snow globe or music box is recommended for persons with late stage dementia but would be suitable for individuals with early to moderate Alzheimer's, too. The same goes for a memory box or favorite CD, either of which could be enjoyed throughout the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Undoubtedly, the best gift you can give a person with Alzheimer's or a related dementia is your time, attention, and respect – and be sure to include lots of hugs, holding hands, and reassurance.