

Navigating the Holidays and Alzheimer's in the COVID-19 Era

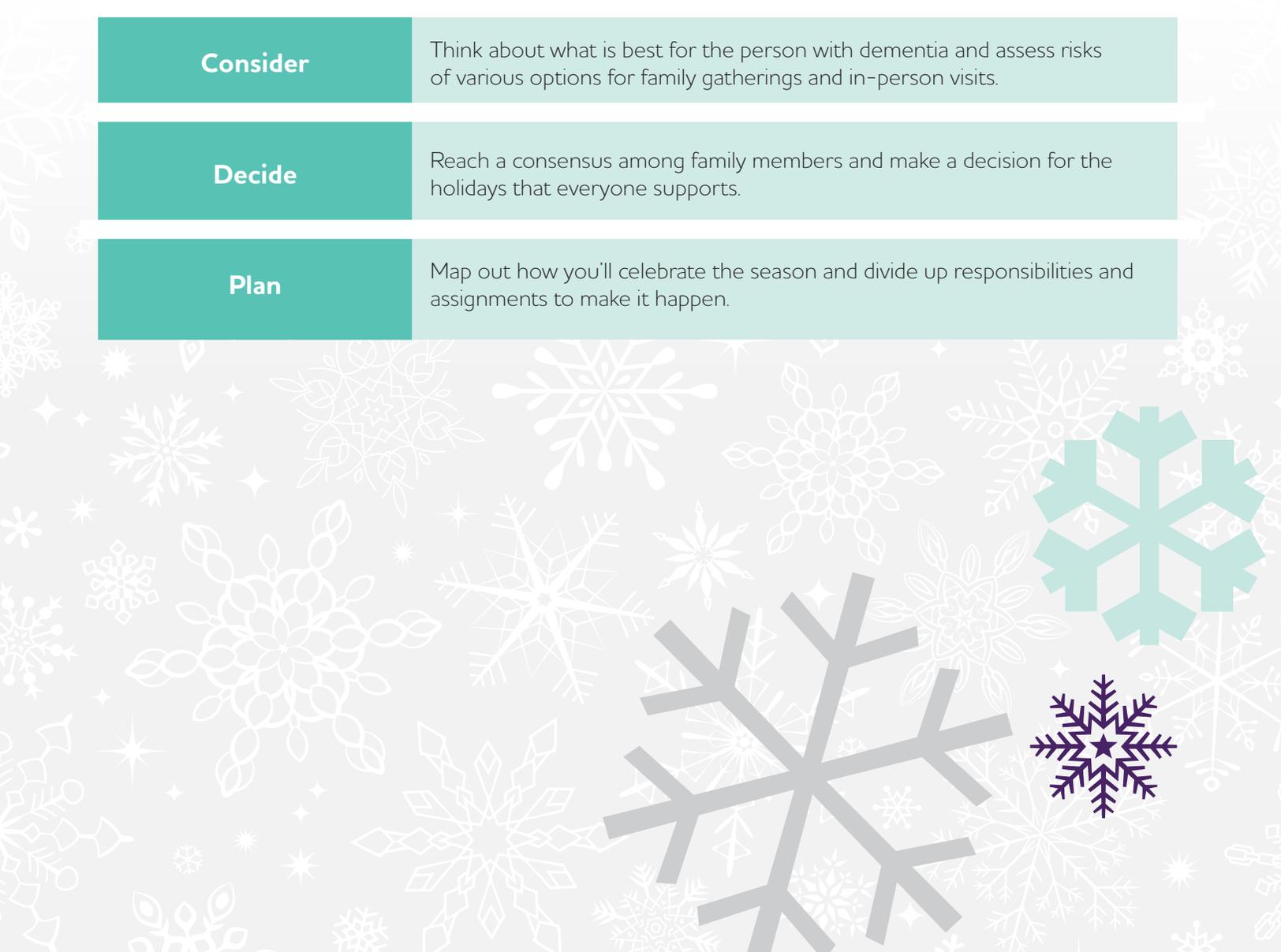
With COVID-19 surging across the country, families are struggling with decisions about the upcoming holiday season—weighing concerns about the safety of traveling and gathering with the desire to spend time with friends and relatives. For families who have a loved one with Alzheimer's or another dementia, these decisions are even harder, especially since many families have forgone visits with grandparents, parents, and older relatives since COVID-19 began. The emotional pull to see and spend time with these loved ones during the holiday season is felt very keenly.

To help families in their decision-making, a team of Alzheimer's Association care consultants created this guide of tips and things to consider. We hope you will find it useful.



Start Now to Plan and Prepare for the Holidays

Discuss	Schedule a family Zoom or FaceTime to talk about upcoming holiday celebrations and visiting a loved one with dementia. If there is a family member serving as the primary caregiver for the loved one, be sure to include them in the discussion.
Consult	Check the CDC website— cdc.gov —for COVID19 guidelines on visits with individuals deemed higher risk/vulnerable.
Consider	Think about what is best for the person with dementia and assess risks of various options for family gatherings and in-person visits.
Decide	Reach a consensus among family members and make a decision for the holidays that everyone supports.
Plan	Map out how you'll celebrate the season and divide up responsibilities and assignments to make it happen.



Planning for virtual holiday celebrations

Start right away to create an enjoyable and meaningful holiday season by utilizing technology and Zoom/Facebook offerings to bring the family together.

Find out the current device being used by the person with the disease and their caregiver. It may be necessary for the family to consider purchasing a new, updated device to make viewing and participation in virtual activities more enjoyable. (Note this could be a joint family holiday gift for the loved one.)

To ensure the person with the disease and their caregiver are able to participate in virtual events, arrange for training. For instance, seniorplanet.org is a nonprofit that offers free videos and classes for seniors to learn technology.

Identify one or two family members who can serve as the point persons to coordinate the details and logistics of the various virtual offerings.

Create a line-up of fun, entertaining, and emotional video programs throughout the season:

Cook favorite dishes together virtually in the days leading up to the holiday.

Share the holiday meal by having the loved one and their caregiver join your family virtually.

Recreate family rituals in the new virtual space by saying a special blessing or having everyone around the virtual table say what they are grateful for this year.

Organize a series of musical performances where children play a musical instrument or sing holiday songs. These performances can be live or recorded as video and shared with the loved one.

Schedule virtual baking sessions with the loved one during the holiday season.

Introduce new holiday traditions virtually, such as Couch Caroling, Gingerbread House Construction Competition, etc.

Play a family favorite game or find a new one to try over Zoom or FaceTime.

Synchronize a virtual watch party of a cherished holiday movie via an online streaming service.

Planning for a safe visit

Check the CDC website—[cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)—for the latest COVID-19 guidelines on visits with individuals deemed higher risk/vulnerable.

Avoid or minimize any type of travel for the person with dementia during this busy travel season. Even car trips present risks, such as rest stops and restaurants.

Restrict the number of individuals who will visit during the holidays.

Visitors must fully commit to adhering to the guidelines—pre visit and during the visit—such as quarantining for the appropriate time period prior to the visit, wearing a mask and maintaining safe social distancing during the visit, etc.

Make sure your loved one with dementia wears a mask when visitors are in the home. If they refuse or are unable to wear a mask, maintain social distance in a well-ventilated area and ensure everyone else is wearing a mask.

Consider having one family member be the official holiday helper for your loved one with dementia. This should be someone who practices social distancing on a regular basis and is able to commit fully to the necessary safety precautions. If another relative serves as the loved one's primary caregiver, the official holiday helper could provide much needed assistance and respite for them.

Communicating about holiday plans

Involve the loved one with dementia in the planning as much as possible and as appropriate to the stage of dementia.

If the person has early stage dementia, inform them of changes early and repeat as necessary to help them adjust.

If the person is in the middle to late stages, it may be more appropriate to address the new plans as they happen to avoid unnecessary confusion and stress.

Keep in mind that for someone with advanced dementia, it is not necessary to talk about the pandemic. Instead, simply remind them that there is a flu bug going around. Therefore, masks will be worn, or some visitors will not be coming as in previous years.

How to support a caregiver you won't be seeing over the holidays

Be in touch with the caregiver on a regular basis—at a time that works best for them and allows enough time to talk.

Talk with a caregiver about what they need and how you can support them; and even help to develop a specific list. Share the list with others in the family.

Depending on how far away you live, **consider going to the home for a day and doing outside tasks**—yard work, home repairs, putting up outside holiday decorations.

Find out if there are specific tasks that can be taken off their plate—gift buying, Christmas cards, etc.

Making the holidays meaningful for a loved one in a long-term care community:

Check into the policies for visiting on the specific holidays.

Ask if presents or food items can be sent to residents.

If you need to sign up for visits on the holidays, be sure to do that as soon as possible.

Find out whether there are audio-visual capabilities in your loved one's room or whether they have access to community equipment. Then consider sending them a mobile tablet and/or small CD player and also holiday song lists or classic movies. (Either digitally or on CD/DVD.)

Inquire about the community's plans for the holiday season, such as festive activities and decorations.



Gift ideas for a loved one with dementia and a family caregiver

- 1 Make a holiday scrapbook** full of photos from holidays past and send that to the person with dementia prior to the holidays. This will help them to feel love and connected.
- 2 Ask the caregiver for a gift list** for the person with dementia and arrange for the items to be sent to the house.
- 3 Ask the caregiver for their own gift list** and then arrange to have gifts sent to the house.
- 4 Create a family video montage.** Ask the family to record short clips and ask a tech-savvy family member to put it together.
- 5 Encourage family/friends to give different gifts this year,** such as a weekly phone call for the entire year or a monthly card.
- 6 Consider sending a monthly delivery of a home cooked or restaurant-purchased meal.** Look into **gift cards** for household or **yard work services.** Think ahead to what might be helpful the rest of the year.
- 7 Have someone in the family design a family mask** and give one to all family members.