

# ALZHEIMER'S *and the* HOLIDAYS

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## FINDING JOY IN THE SEASON

For families living with Alzheimer's and other dementias, the holidays can be bittersweet and challenging. Festivities can agitate, confuse, and over stimulate persons with the disease. Care partners can be overwhelmed by trying to maintain holiday traditions while providing care. Holiday gatherings and family get togethers can become stressful and uncomfortable.

### ***Take a deep breath.***

With some planning and adjusted expectations, as well as tips from the Alzheimer's Association staff, your celebrations can still be happy, memorable occasions.

# CAREGIVER TIPS

*Caregivers often battle feelings of stress, guilt and anger, and those feelings can increase with the pressure to fulfill all the traditional holiday obligations. There are simple, positive steps you can take to more fully enjoy the blessings of the season.*

<b>1</b> Make sure family members understand your caregiving situation and set realistic expectations about what you can and cannot do. No one should expect you to maintain every tradition or event.	<b>2</b> Do only what you can reasonably manage; and give yourself permission to say no. It is not being selfish, and you should not feel guilty.	
<b>3</b> Scale back on shopping and gift giving. Friends and relatives will understand.	<b>4</b> Decide which traditions are most important to you and which you can live without.	<b>5</b> Try to maintain a regular routine as much as possible throughout the season.
<b>6</b> Prepare your loved one for the upcoming holiday events by talking about and showing photos of family members and friends who will be visiting.	<b>7</b> Attend an Alzheimer's support group that will allow you to discuss ways to overcome holiday stress.	<b>8</b> Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900 if you're feeling overwhelmed.
<b>9</b> Maintain your health. If you don't care for yourself you will not be able to care for anyone else. Don't skip medications or medical appointments. Do your best to exercise and eat properly to help sustain your energy, and try to avoid alcohol.	<b>10</b> Simplify decorating. It is not only time consuming but can be confusing (blinking lights) and sometimes unsafe (wires, cords, candles) for the person with the disease. Instead, you might plan an outing to look at holiday lights and decorations.	<b>11</b> Plan for post-holiday letdown after out-of-town guests have gone back home. Arrange for in home care so that you can enjoy a movie or lunch with a friend and reduce some of the post-holiday loneliness you may feel.

# ALERTING FAMILY & FRIENDS

*The holidays are full of emotions, so it can help to let guests know ahead of time about a loved one's changes in behavior and appearance. Preparing families and friends with an honest appraisal of the person's condition can help avoid uncomfortable situations.*

*If a loved one is in the early stages of Alzheimer's, relatives and friends might not notice major changes; though the person with dementia may have trouble following conversation or repeating themselves. If the person is in the middle or late stages of Alzheimer's, there may be significant changes in cognitive abilities since the last time an out-of-town friend or relative has visited. You might consider calling or even sending an email to folks who may not have visited since last year.*

## SOME SIMPLE POINTS TO MAKE:

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I'm reaching out to let you know how things are going at our house. While we're looking forward to your visit, we thought it might be helpful if you understood our current situation before you arrive.

You may notice that \_\_\_\_\_ has changed since you last saw him/her. Among the changes you may notice are \_\_\_\_\_.

Because \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes has problems remembering and thinking clearly, his/her behavior is a little unpredictable.

Please understand that \_\_\_\_\_ may not remember who you are and may confuse you with someone else. Please don't feel offended by this.

A warm smile and a gentle touch on their shoulder or hand will be appreciated more than you know.

We would ask that you call when you're nearby so we can prepare for your arrival. With your help and support, we can create a holiday memory that we'll all treasure.

”

# CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

*If you're traveling home this holiday season, consider how you can help the primary caregiver while you're visiting.*

## SOME SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

<b>ASK</b>	Ask how the caregiver is doing, and give them time to discuss their feelings and concerns.
<b>VISIT</b>	Sit and visit with the person with the disease so the caregiver can go shopping or finish up holiday preparations.
<b>OFFER</b>	Offer to run errands.
<b>INQUIRE</b>	Inquire as to what tasks can be done around the house - laundry, yard work, cleaning, home repair, etc.
<b>RETHINK</b>	Rethink gift giving for the caregiver. Purchase movie tickets or a restaurant gift certificate and arrange for someone to handle caregiving during that time. Or consider a certificate for household or yardwork service.
<b>AVOID</b>	Avoid judging and critiquing the caregiver. Instead, offer support and also talk about how you can help, from a distance.

# MODIFYING CELEBRATIONS

*There are a number of things families can do to minimize stress and maximize the enjoyment of being together and celebrating the season with a family member living with Alzheimer's.*

## PLANNING

- Arrange for a **family meeting** (face-to-face, phone call, or email) to discuss holiday celebrations.
- Consider **multiple small holiday meals** with fewer people, instead of one large gathering.
- Hold events **earlier in the day** to avoid evening confusion for the person with Alzheimer's.
- Have **everyone pick a job to do**, even if this is a change for the family who always relied on mom to do everything in preparation for the big meal.

## DAY OF

- Make **nametags** for everyone attending.
- Have a **quiet room** so the person with Alzheimer's can relax or visit quietly with one or two people.
- Keep the **lights on** to keep the room bright.
- Turn the **television off** and turn the **music down**.
- Keep an eye on the person with the disease - **watch for overstimulation and tiredness**.
- Plan time for **breaks and/or a nap** for the person with the disease.

# COMMUNICATION TIPS

*First and foremost, when talking with a loved one with Alzheimer's, be prepared to accept their reality – whether that is today or 20 years ago. Follow their lead and consider these simple ways to make the conversation go more smoothly.*



# IF A LOVED ONE IS IN A HOSPITAL/FACILITY

*Here are some simple suggestions to help you and your family celebrate with a loved one who is in a hospital or a care facility during the holiday season.*



# AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

If you're concerned about a loved one's memory issues or behavior, start the conversation with family members. Try and get consensus about what everyone experienced to see if concerns are shared.

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REACH OUT TO THE  
ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION  
HELPLINE WITH QUESTIONS

**800.272.3900**

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