

Holiday Hints

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 an AD loved one. These hints are our gift in wishing you an enjoyable holiday season.

- Holidays can be meaningful enriching times for both the patient and family. Maintaining (or adapting) old family rituals and traditions helps all family members feel a sense of belonging and family identity. For an AD patient, this link with a familiar past is reassuring and builds self-esteem, i.e. “Look at the beautiful family that I created.”
- Set your own limits early, and be clear about them with others. You don’t have to live up to the expectations of friends and relatives. Your situation is different now.
- Encourage family and friends to visit **EVEN IF IT IS PAINFUL FOR THEM**. Keep the number of persons visiting at one time to a minimum, or try a few persons visiting quietly with the patient in a separate room. Most AD patients can pull it together for brief periods, if they have adequate private rest in between.
- Try some simple holiday preparation with the patient several days ahead. Just observe your preparations will familiarize him/her with the upcoming festivities, if they participate with you, they experience the pleasure of helping and giving as well as the fun of anticipation and reminiscing.
- Prepare potential 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 to avoid situations that further confuse or frustrate many patients:
 - Crowds of people who expect the patient to remember them
 - Noise, loud conversations or loud music
 - Strange or different surroundings
 - Changes in light intensity-too bright or too dark
 - Over-indulgence in rich or special food and drink (especially alcohol)
 - Change in regular routine and sleep patterns
- Try scheduling activities, especially some outdoor exercise, early in the day to avoid the fatigue from added activity at the end of a long day. Familiar holiday music, story-telling, singing or church services (even on TV) may be especially enjoyable.
- If you receive invitations to holiday celebrations that the patient cannot attend, **GO YOURSELF**. Enjoy the chance to be with friends and family who love you and enjoy your company, with or without your relative.

Preparing the Guests

1. Explain clearly as possible what has happened to the person with AD. Give examples of the unusual behaviors that may take place: incontinence, eating food with their fingers, wandering, and hallucinations.
2. Explain that it may not be appropriate behavior but the person has a memory loss and does not remember what is expected and accepted.
3. Remind that visitor through phone calls or letters to be understanding and not to shun the person.
4. If this is the first visit since the family member became severely impaired, tell the person that the visit may be painful. The memory-impaired person may not remember the guest's name or relationship.
5. Explain that memory loss is a result of the disease and it is not intentional.
6. Stress with guests that what is important is the meaningfulness of the moment spent together and not what the person remembers.

Preparing the Memory-Impaired Person

1. Begin showing a picture of the guest to the person a week before the arrival.
2. Spend more time each day explaining who the visitor is while showing the picture.
3. Arrange for a phone call for the patient and the visitor. The conversation may help both. The call gives the visitor an idea what to expect and gives the memory-impaired person an opportunity to familiarize himself with the visitor.
4. Keep the memory-impaired person's routine as close to normal as possible.
5. During the hustle and bustle of the holiday season guard against fatigue and find time for adequate rest.