



Alzheimer's and the Holidays



The holidays are a joyful time. But for those caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease (AD), the season can be stressful. With the following tips, you can plan ahead to create a happy, healthy environment and make sweet memories of your holiday season.

Holiday Visits

- Maintain or adapt family traditions so all family members feel a sense of belonging and family identity. This link with a familiar past is reassuring and builds self-esteem for the person with dementia.
- Set your own limits early, and be clear about them with others.
- Encourage family and friends to visit even if it's painful for them. Limit the number of people visiting at one time, or try a few people visiting with your loved one quietly in a separate room. Most people with AD can pull it together for brief periods if they have adequate rest in between visits.
- Try simple holiday preparation with your loved one several days ahead. Observing 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 quiet distractions (a family photo album or a simple, repetitive chore like cracking nuts) if your loved one becomes upset or over-stimulated.
- Avoid situations that further confuse or frustrate your loved one such as crowds of people who expect your loved one 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 food or drink (especially alcohol); change in regular routine and sleep patterns.
- Schedule activities, especially outdoor exercise, early in the day to avoid fatigue at the end of a long day. Familiar holiday music, storytelling, singing or church services (even on TV) may be especially enjoyable.
- Attend holiday celebrations even if your loved one can't attend. Enjoy the chance to be with friends and family who love you and enjoy your company, with or without your relative.

Preparing Guests

- Explain to guests what has happened to your loved one with AD. Give examples of unusual behaviors that may occur: incontinence, eating food with their fingers, wandering, hallucinations, etc.
- Explain that the person has memory loss and does not remember what is expected and acceptable.
- Remind visitors prior to the holidays to be understanding and not to shun your loved one.
- If this is the first visit since the family member became impaired, tell visitors it may be painful. The memory-impaired person may not remember the guest's name or relationship.
- Explain that memory loss is a result of the disease and it is not intentional.
- Stress to guests the meaningfulness of the time spent together and not what the person remembers.

Preparing Your Loved One with Alzheimer's

- Begin showing a picture of guests to the person a week before their arrival.
- Spend time each day explaining who the visitor is while showing the picture.
- Arrange a phone call for the patient and the visitor. The call gives the visitor an idea of what to expect and your loved one a chance to familiarize themselves with the visitor.
- Keep your loved one's routine as close to normal as possible.
- Guard against fatigue and find time for adequate rest during the holidays.



alzheimer's  association®

Greater Dallas Chapter

24/7 Helpline: 1.800.292.3900 | alz.org/greaterdallas