

## 9 Tips for Caregiving over the Holidays

### Tip 1: Planning can ease holiday stress

Individuals who experience the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who have given little thought to the challenges they will encounter. Consider ahead of time what may be expected of you, both socially and emotionally.

- Discuss holiday celebrations with relatives and close friends in advance.
- Plan to maintain a regular routine while trying to provide a pleasant, meaningful, and calm holiday event.
- Celebrate early in the day or have a noon meal rather than a late dinner.

### Tip 2: Take care of yourself (caregiver)

Remember, the holidays are opportunities to share time with people you love. Try to make these celebrations easy on yourself and on the person with Alzheimer's disease so that you can concentrate on enjoying your time together.

- Set limits by telling family and friends that you intend to control stress this holiday season.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Ask for assistance for you and/or your loved one.
- Attend an Alzheimer's Association support group that will allow you discuss ways to overcome holiday stress.
- Prepare to deal with post-holiday letdown. Arrange for in-home care (respite care) so you can enjoy a movie or lunch with a friend, and reduce post-holiday stress.

### Tip 3: Prepare the person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia for the family gathering

Preparing your loved one for upcoming holiday events can help both of you to enjoy the warmth of the season.

- Talk about and show photos of family members and friends who will be visiting.
- Have a "quiet" room in case things get too hectic.
- Play familiar music and serve favorite holiday foods.
- Schedule naps, especially if the person usually takes naps.
- Schedule time for family and friends to visit.

### Tip 4: Prepare family members and friends

Preparing families and friends with an honest evaluation of the person's condition can help avoid uncomfortable or harmful situations.

- Familiarize family members and friends with behaviors and condition changes.
- Recommend practical and useful gifts (see Tip 7).
- Remind family and friends about the best way to communicate with a person with dementia (see Tip 6).

### Tip 5: Involve everyone when selecting activities

Involve everyone in holiday activities, including the person with dementia.

- Consider taking walks, icing cookies, telling stories, doing chores, making a memory book or family tree, or keeping a journal.
- To encourage conversation, place magazines, scrapbooks, or photo albums within reach; play music to prompt dancing or other kinds of exercise.
- Encourage young family members to participate in simple and familiar activities with the person.
- Be calm and supportive if the person has trouble communicating.
- Speak slowly with a relaxed tone.
- Avoid criticism. For example, when someone forgets a recent conversation, avoid asking, "Don't you remember?"
- Address the person by name.
- Be patient, flexible, and do not argue with your loved one who has Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

### Tip 6: Smart gift giving

- Encourage family and friends to give useful, practical gifts for the person such as an identification bracelet (available through Medic Alert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®).
- Other gifts may include comfortable, easy-to-remove clothing, audiotapes of favorite music, videos, and photo albums.
- Advise others not to give complex gifts, such as dangerous tools or instruments, utensils, challenging board games, complicated electronic equipment, or pets.
- If possible, involve the person in giving gifts. For example, someone who once enjoyed cooking may enjoy baking cookies; or, buy the gift and allow the person to wrap it.

### Tip 7: Create a safe environment in the home

Your loved one may experience changes in judgment. This behavior may lead to confusion, frustration, or wandering. Consider these tips to reduce the risk of injury and situations that could cause confusion for someone diagnosed with dementia.

- Arrange a “buddy” to watch out for the person and ensure their comfort.
- Arrange plenty of space for walking side-by-side, for wheelchairs, and for walkers. Keep walking areas clear.
- Consider seating options so the person with dementia can best focus on conversation and be least distracted.
- Don’t serve alcohol, which may lead to inappropriate behavior or interactions with medications.
- Accommodate changes in vision. Place contrasting color rugs in front of doors or steps. Avoid dark-colored rugs that may look like “holes.”
- Limit access to places where injuries can occur, such as the kitchen or stairwell.
- Check the temperature of water and food.
- Create even levels of lighting; avoid blinking lights.
- Keep decorations simple; avoid using candies, artificial fruits/vegetables, or other edibles as decorations.
- Supervise in taking medicine.
- Keep emergency phone numbers and a list of medications handy.

### Tip 8: Travel wisely

The following suggestions may help to ensure a positive traveling experience:

- Never leave the person alone.
- Use familiar modes of transportation and avoid peak travel times. Keep plans simple and maintain daily routines as much as possible.
- Allow extra time to avoid the stress of rushing.
- Advise service and hospitality staff that you are traveling with someone with dementia and inform them about the person’s behaviors and special needs.
- Arrange for services, such as wheelchairs, ahead of time.
- Provide identification items, such as a Medic Alert® + Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return® bracelet and clothing labels.

### Tip 9: Reliable sources of support

Families can call the Alzheimer’s Association at (727) 578-2558 or the 24-hour helpline at (800) 772- 8672 to get answers to questions about warning signs, and to receive assistance for persons with dementia and caregivers. The helpline is open Christmas Day and New Year’s Day, as well as year round.