



Holiday Hints For Alzheimer's Caregivers



Holidays can be meaningful, enriching times for both the person with [Alzheimer's disease](#) and his or her family. Maintaining or adapting family rituals and traditions helps all family members feel a sense of belonging and family identity. For a person with Alzheimer's, this link with a familiar past is reassuring.

However, celebrations, special events, or holidays, which may include other people, can cause confusion and anxiety for a person with Alzheimer's. He or she may find some situations easier and more pleasurable than others. The tips below can help you balance busy holiday activities with everyday care for a person with Alzheimer's disease.



Finding The Right Balance

Many caregivers have mixed feelings about holidays. They may have happy memories of the past, but they also may worry about the extra demands that holidays make on their time and energy.

Here are some ways to balance doing many holiday-related activities while taking care of your own needs and those of the person with Alzheimer's disease:



- Celebrate holidays that are important to you. Include the person with Alzheimer's as much as possible.
- Set your own limits, and be clear about them with others. You do not have to live up to the expectations of friends or relatives. Your situation is different now.
- Involve the person with Alzheimer's in simple holiday preparations, or have him or her observe your preparations. Observing you will familiarize him or her with the upcoming festivities. Participating with you may give the person the pleasure of helping and the fun of anticipating and reminiscing.

Finding The Right Balance (cont'd)

- Consider simplifying your holidays around the home. For example, rather than cooking an elaborate dinner, consider a smaller dinner with close family. Instead of elaborate decorations, consider choosing a few select items.
- When health and safety provisions allow, encourage friends and family to visit even if it's difficult. Limit the number of visitors at any one time. Plan visits when the person usually is at his or her best. Virtual visits through video or phone calls are also a great way to connect over the holiday season.
- Prepare quiet distractions to use, such as looking at pictures or going for a walk, if the person with Alzheimer's becomes upset or overstimulated.
- Make sure there is a quiet space where the person can rest and have time to recharge.
- Try to avoid situations that may confuse or frustrate the person with Alzheimer's, such as changes in routine and strange places.
- Try to stay away from noise, loud conversations, loud music, lighting that is too bright or too dark, and having too much rich food or drink (especially alcohol).
- Find time for holiday activities you like to do. For example, go for a walk in the neighborhood and look at holiday decorations, or bake holiday cookies.
- If you receive invitations to events that the person with Alzheimer's cannot attend, consider going yourself. Ask a friend or family member to spend time with the person while you're out.



Holiday Home Safety Tips

Holiday decorations, such as Christmas trees, lights, or menorahs, should be secured so that they do not fall or catch on fire. Anything flammable should be monitored at all times, and extra precautions should be taken so that lights or anything breakable are fixed firmly, correctly, and out of the way of those with Alzheimer's disease. Candles should never be lit without supervision. When not in use, they should be put away. Also, try to avoid clutter, especially in walkways, during the holidays. For more home safety tips, visit [Home Safety and Alzheimer's Disease](#).

Preparing Guests

Explain to guests that the person with Alzheimer's disease does not always remember what is expected and acceptable. Give examples of unusual behaviors that may take place such as [incontinence](#), eating food with fingers, [wandering](#), or [hallucinations](#).

If this is the first visit since the person with Alzheimer's became severely impaired, inform people ahead of time what they can expect. The memory-impaired person may not remember guests' names or relationships but can still enjoy their company.

- Explain that memory loss is the result of the disease and is not intentional.
- Stress that the meaningfulness of the moment together matters more than what the person remembers.

For more information, visit [Helping Family and Friends Understand Alzheimer's](#).



Preparing The Person With Alzheimer's

Here are some tips to help the person with Alzheimer's disease get ready for visitors:

- Begin showing a photo of the guest to the person a week before arrival. Each day, explain who the visitor is while showing the photo.
- Arrange a phone call for the person with Alzheimer's and the visitor. The call gives the visitor an idea of what to expect and gives the person with Alzheimer's an opportunity to become familiar with the visitor.
- Keep the memory-impaired person's routine as close to normal as possible.
- During the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, guard against fatigue and find time for adequate rest.



We Can Help!

Alzheimer's Orange County

Call 844.373.4400

For more caregiver tips

**Visit us at:
www.alzoc.org/resources**

Information taken from the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health> | NIH May 2017 | Reviewed by AlzOC July 2022