

Celebrating holidays with loved ones affected by Alzheimer's disease and dementia

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The holidays are a time to share with the people you love. When Alzheimer's disease and dementia affects family members and friends, some modifications may be needed in order to ensure that everyone has an equally enjoyable experience. Below are some suggestions to help ensure that everyone can better appreciate the holiday season.

Involve the person with dementia in holiday activities:

- Preparing food, wrapping packages, assisting with decorations, and setting the table are all simple tasks that the person can help you with, making them feel involved in the preparation.
- Maintain the individual's normal routine so that preparations do not become confusing or disruptive. Avoid using blinking lights, candles, artificial fruits and vegetables or other edibles as decorations, which may further lead to confusion.
- Build on existing traditions and memories to establish comfort and familiarity.

Gift Ideas for those affected by dementia:

- Base the type of gift on their interests and abilities. In early stages, a person may enjoy tickets to a show or musical, as well as simple games such as bingo and dominoes.
- Towards the middle and later stages of Alzheimer's, encourage people to buy useful gifts such as comfortable and easy to remove clothing, photo albums, subscriptions to magazines of interest which reflect hobbies, videos and audiotapes of favorite music, books, animals, sports teams, destinations, etc.
- Advise people not to give gifts that may be too dangerous, challenging, or complicated.

Modify your expectations:

- Discuss holiday celebrations plans ahead of time, letting others know your care-giving situation.
- Consider inviting fewer people, having a simpler meal, having a potluck dinner, or asking others to host the holiday at their home.

- Consider celebrating holidays during lunch or brunch hours, rather than an evening meal. It is typical for individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's to experience increased confusion as the day progresses. By having an early day celebration, everyone, including your loved one, will be more rested.

Caring for yourself:

- When loved ones ask what to buy you for the holiday, suggest a gift card to your favorite restaurant or store. Also, suggesting something that will help you as a caregiver, may be nice as well, such as a cleaning or household chore service, a massage or a few hours of "quiet time."

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