

TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays are often filled with opportunities for togetherness, sharing, laughter and memories. But they can also bring stress, disappointment and sadness. A person living with Alzheimer's may feel a special sense of loss during the holidays because of the changes he or she has experienced. At the same time, caregivers may feel overwhelmed maintaining traditions while providing care.

ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

- Call a face-to-face meeting or arrange for a group discussion for family and friends to discuss holiday celebrations. Make sure that everyone understands your caregiving situation and has realistic expectations about what you can and cannot do. No one should expect you to maintain every holiday tradition or event.
- Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably manage. If you've always invited 15 to 20 people to your home, consider inviting five for a simpler meal. Think about having a potluck dinner, asking someone to order and bring dinner, or asking others to host.

INVOLVE THE PERSON LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER'S

- Involve the person in safe, manageable holiday preparation activities that he or she enjoys. Ask him or her to help you prepare food, wrap packages, help decorate or set the table. (Avoid using candies, artificial fruits and vegetables as decorations because a person with dementia might confuse them with real food. Blinking lights may also confuse the person.)
- Maintain the person's normal routine as much as possible, so that holiday preparations don't become disruptive or confusing. Taking on too many tasks can wear on both of you.
- Build on traditions and memories. Your family member may find comfort in singing holiday songs, but you may also experiment with new traditions that might be less stressful or a better fit with your caregiving responsibilities, such as watching seasonal movies.

ADAPT GIFT GIVING

- Provide people with suggestions for useful and enjoyable gifts for the person, comfortable, easy-to-remove clothing; CDs of favorite music; photo albums of family and friends; or favorite treats.
- Advise people not to give gifts such as dangerous tools or instruments, utensils, challenging board games, complicated electronic equipment or pets.
- If friends or family members ask you what you'd like for a gift, you may want to suggest a gift certificate or something that will help make things easier, like housecleaning; lawn, handyman or laundry services; restaurant gift cards; or even volunteer to visit with the person for an afternoon so you can have some time off.

TRY TO BE FLEXIBLE

- Celebrate over lunch or brunch, rather than an evening meal, so you can work around the evening confusion, or sundowning, if it sometimes affects the person with Alzheimer's.