

Holiday Hints for Caregiver Families



The holiday seasons for many families is filled with opportunity for togetherness. They are times when everyone can gather to share good food, memories, laughter, and companionship. But holidays can also be filled with stress, disappointment, and sadness for families coping with Alzheimer's.

A person with Alzheimer's may feel a special sense of loss and may exhibit unusual behaviors during the holiday season. At the same time, caregivers may feel overwhelmed with efforts to maintain holiday traditions on top of caring for the person with this disease.

These feelings are normal and that you are not alone. Here are some helpful hints that may reduce the stress for all involved:

Caregivers

- Adjust your expectations for yourself and others.
- Maintain your regular routine as much as possible.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule.
- Honor family customs within reason.
- Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably manage.
- Give yourself permission to say no to obligations, but accept invitations to enjoy being with others even if your loved one cannot attend.
- Be willing to ask for and accept help.
- Make lists of tasks and responsibilities others can do. When they say "What can I do to help?" you can respond with specific ideas.
- Prepare family & visitors about changes in your loved ones's behavior, appearance and memory.
- Attend an Alzheimer's/dementia support group or arrange for respite care.
- Take care of yourself, maintain exercise and eating habits. Relax and enjoy!

Person with Alzheimer's

- Involve the person throughout preparations - food preparation - set table - fold towels, laundry - do whatever is possible
- Prepare them for visitors; talk about and share pictures of people coming to visit.
- Use name tags for visitors.
- Prepare list of potential activities/tasks to divert attention from over stimulation and agitation.
- Create "To Do" list of activities that can be done by individual or with little assistance so caregiver can complete holiday tasks.
- Minimize decorations that may cause confusion (artificial fruits/vegetables, blinking lights).

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- Maintain normal routine and sleep schedule.
- Build on past traditions/memories, rent seasonal videos before holiday, play seasonal music.
- Have “quiet room” if things get too hectic and have someone familiar stay with person.
- Have person attend adult day care or arrange for respite care.
- Limit amount of noise and confusion.

Visitor

In the Home

- Call ahead to a schedule good time for visit.
- Educate yourself about memory loss and Alzheimer’s by attending a support group, through the internet www.alz.org or by calling the Alzheimer’s Association 1-800-272-3900.
- Keep visit short and quiet, wear a name tag if necessary.
- Bring pictures and reminisce about past holidays.
- Listen to or sing familiar music.
- Ask Caregiver to update you on appearance/behavior before visit.
- Offer to help Caregiver by providing respite, meals, run errands.
- Have Caregiver offer communication techniques; go with the flow!
- Be emotionally available if Caregiver wants to talk about the situation.

In long-term care

- Limit amount of noise and confusion; may need to meet in quiet room.
- Visit early in day; visit individually or in small groups.
- Don’t expect them to participate in their old roles.
- Allow them to be an observer.
- Prayer and scripture reading are often welcomed.
- Children are a joy, but prepare the children.

Taken From: http://www.alz.org/documents/ms/ResourceGuide_MS_2009.pdf

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