

Alzheimer's
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Programs and
Services

Helpline

Support Groups

Early Stage Memory
Loss Program

Care Management

Family Counseling

Speakers Bureau

Educational
Workshops and
Training Programs

Research

Advocacy

Preparing for the Holidays

Ten Tips to Help Caregivers Manage and Enjoy the Season

Many families coping with Alzheimer's disease look toward the approaching holiday season with feelings of both anticipation and apprehension. While the holidays can be a challenging time for caregivers and families, they offer, above all, an opportunity to spend special time with loved ones. Here are some suggestions to help guide caregivers through the holiday season:

Talk with relatives and close friends about holiday celebrations. Make sure everyone understands the situation and has realistic expectations. Make plans together on how you will handle upcoming celebrations.

Set priorities and do only what you feel you can reasonably manage. It may not be possible to maintain every holiday tradition. Prioritize and focus on what matters most to you and your family.

Ask for help and support. Develop a checklist of tasks and responsibilities. If friends or family members offer their help, you can respond with a specific idea. Agreeing to let someone help with tasks such as shopping, wrapping gifts, or cooking can help to ease your burden.

Involve your loved one in safe, manageable holiday activities. This can help to prepare the person for the holiday and

give you an opportunity to spend quality time together. Breaking large tasks into small ones may enable your loved one to assist. Some ideas include: hanging decorations; sealing and stamping holiday cards; folding napkins and setting the table; and wrapping gifts.

Maintain your loved one's normal routine so these holiday activities don't become too disruptive or confusing. Remember: taking on too many tasks at one time can wear on you and your loved one. Try to blend seasonal traditions into daily activities that you both depend on, such as taking a relaxing walk.

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Preparing for the Holidays

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Avoid overcrowded, overstimulating, noisy situations that may be overwhelming to someone with Alzheimer's.

Overstimulation can trigger difficult behaviors. If possible try to avoid: crowds who might pressure the person to remember; loud conversations; loud music; unfamiliar surroundings; and changes in light intensity. Consider providing space for one-on-one visits with your loved one.

Build on past traditions and memories, but also experiment with new holiday traditions. Maintaining or adapting family traditions helps all family members feel a sense of belonging. For a person with Alzheimer's, this link with a familiar past is reassuring and helps with self-orientation.

Address feelings of loss. During the busy holiday season, it's normal to experience feelings of loss and sadness in remember-

ing "what was." Build on the memories you created with your loved one by enjoying the time you have together now.

Give yourself permission to say no when you need to. You know what's best for your situation. Realize that you don't have to live up to any preconceived expectations.

Above all, remember that holidays are opportunities to share time with the people you love. Try to make these celebrations easy on yourself and your loved one so that you may concentrate on enjoying your time together.

From: "Just the Facts and More - Holidays," Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association, Inc., 1992 and "Holiday Caretips" Alzheimer's Association - Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter Newsletter, Winter 1997.

Resources for the Holidays

"Just the Facts and More - Holidays,"

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association, Inc, 1992

"The Giftgiver's Guide to Shopping for the Older Adult,"

Stephanie Zeman, RN, MSN

To obtain these and other resources, contact the chapter office at (734) 677-3081 or (800) 337-3827.

Great Gifts for People With Alzheimer's

Here are just a few of the many appropriate gifts that a person with Alzheimer's might enjoy:

- ***Visits*** - No gift is more special than time spent with a loved one.
- ***Hugs*** - Many people with Alzheimer's missed being touched.
- ***Music*** - Tapes of soft, familiar music or music boxes.
- ***Books and Magazines*** - Those with few words and large colorful photographs or illustrations.
- ***Photo Albums*** - Including enlarged photos from earlier days featuring life achievements and significant events.
- ***Videotapes*** - Old movies, old television shows, or exercise tapes.
- ***Identification bracelet*** (Alzheimer's Association Safe Return Program)
- ***Fruit basket, plants or flowers*** - Always a welcome gift.
- ***Clothes*** - Warm-up suits, easy care items.
- ***Personal grooming supplies*** - Lotion, powder.
- ***Gift certificates*** - Beauty shop or barber.
- ***Assistance with errands***
- ***Birdfeeder***
- ***Soft pillows or afghans***

From: "Tis the Season," by Cornelia Poer, MSW Duke Family Support Program, Fall 1993