

Ten Holiday Tips

Caring for a person living with dementia during COVID-19

“The holidays are often filled with sharing, laughter and memories. But they can also bring stress, disappointment, sadness and due to the COVID-19 pandemic a heightened risk for spreading the virus, especially for older adults who tend to have underlying health conditions. A person living with Alzheimer’s may feel a special sense of loss during the holidays because of the changes he or she has experience. At the same time, caregivers may feel overwhelmed by maintaining traditions while providing care and adhering to safety precautions.” ~ Alzheimer Association

It is important when preparing for the holidays that COVID 19 guidelines from Public Health Ontario and your local regions are followed. Keeping this in mind, below are some tips to help caregivers during the holidays.

1. Adjust Expectations

- Discuss holidays in advance as family and friends may need to be aware of changes they may observe in the person living with dementia. This can help to avoid those uncomfortable situations or talking about changes observed with the person living with dementia, in front of them.
- Consider celebrating or connecting virtually during a time of the day that best suits the needs of the person living with dementia. Consider the person with dementia when planning how long the celebration should last. Maybe two short visits rather than a long one.
- Be flexible, cut activities short if it isn’t working for the person or it isn’t the best time.
- If you have a good routine/schedule that works well with the person living with dementia, then continue to follow that routine and schedule.

2. Connect Through Technology

- Arrange for a discussion by telephone or video call. Ask family or friends if you are unsure about technology.
- Think about a time in the day that works best for you and the person living with dementia. If the morning is best for the person living with dementia then plan holiday activities in the morning.
- Having the whole family connecting over technology may be overwhelming. Arrange for a small discussion (one family or one friend per call). Ensure everyone introduces themselves. Structure the call by singing Christmas Carols, sharing pictures, etc.

3. Continue to Practice Physical Distancing

- Continue to participate in holiday traditions, from a distance.
- If family and friends want to drop off food or baked goods, continue to follow physical distancing (porch drop off).
- Schedule a time in the day when family and friends can drive by in the car for a holiday parade.
- Go out for a walk or drive and look at the holiday lights and decorations.

4. Meaningful Engagement

- Create a role or find activities to fill the day that promote feelings of wellness and connection. The goal of this is to ensure that the person living with dementia is happy and content.
- Maintaining attention and participating in a conversation can be difficult. Consider looking at pictures, baking cookies, watching a holiday movie, wrapping a present, singing a familiar holiday song, making a holiday card, or reading/listening to a holiday story. Simplify activities to meet the needs of the person living with dementia.
- Do something that focuses on old memories as this can be more meaningful than what is happening right now. Make new memories and keep old traditions. COVID-19 will change how we celebrate this year; however, memories can still be made. Treasure each moment regardless if this year aligns with previous traditions.
- Activities can be found at the following websites: <https://acclaimhealth.ca/virtual-club/> or <https://athome.alzhn.ca/>

5. Continue to Make Safety a Priority

- Be mindful that some holiday decorations may look edible or are overstimulating for the individual. Family and friends might benefit from your suggestions about gifts that the person might enjoy, be able to use, and are safe.
- Look for anything that may increase risk of falls (outdoor/indoor holiday light cord, holiday mat, clutter, alcoholic drink, burning candles)

6. Continue to Encourage and Promote Relaxation/Sleep

- Keep existing schedules and routines around sleep.
- Continue to promote times in the days where the person living with dementia can relax, in a quiet space.

7. It is okay to say “No”

- Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably and safely manage.
- Trust your instinct. Family may have expectations of the person living with dementia and the caregiver. You, the caregiver, will know best how to support the person living with dementia.
- Remember it is okay to say no, if things are overwhelming it is okay to step back.
- It is never too late to change plans. Being open and honest with family and friends as to why you may need to decline their invitation can help in creating an alternative.
- Choose what works best for you and the person living with dementia.

8. Make time for Yourself

- Give yourself permission to feel and experience grief. Try not to compare this year to previous celebrations. You and your family member’s needs might have changed and COVID 19 continues to impact our daily lives.
- You are your greatest resource. Take care of yourself. Do something small for yourself every day.
- Think about what might help you; consider ordering in meals, continue with your own routine, including respite.
- Have an idea of how people may be able to help if they ask you “what they can do”? Help might be dropping off a meal or an activity, a brief phone call just to say hello.
- Reach out to informal supports such as family or friends who you can talk with and express your concerns.

9. Be Prepared in Case of an Emergency

- In case of an emergency, find out your Family Doctor’s holiday office hours.
- Have a list of walk in clinics, pharmacies and doctors available during the holidays.
- If you become ill, who will support the person living with dementia?

10. Reach out if you need Support

- Reach out to formal supports, your local Alzheimer Society if you need to talk to someone.

This resource was created, in collaboration with Marion Penko (PRC) and Laura Goodyear (PRC). Special thank you to Sandi Robinson (Acclaim Health), Samantha Perry and James Sedgwick (Alzheimer Society Peel) for your feedback and input.



Mississauga Halton Behavioural Supports Ontario
Soutien en cas de troubles du comportement en Ontario de Mississauga Halton



Alzheimer Society
PEEL

St. Joseph’s
Healthcare Hamilton

HALTON SENIORS MENTAL
HEALTH OUTREACH
PROGRAM

Resources:

Alzheimer Association: https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources/holidays?mc_cid=63db88da36&mc_eid=0b2e3e2db5
Alzheimer Society Canada <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/i-have-friend-or-family-member-who-lives-dementia/holidays-special-occasions>
Live Better with Dementia - <https://dementia.livebetterwith.com/blogs/advice/the-12-rules-of-christmas>
Mayo Clinic – By Mayo Clinic Staff - <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/caregivers/in-depth/alzheimers/art-20047715>
Teepa Snow – *Holiday Tips for Everyone Living with Dementia*