

# Soci t  Alzheimer Society

## Making the holiday season successful

The holiday season can be particularly stressful for caregivers and people living with dementia. Unfamiliar places, large groups of people, noise and a hectic pace can increase anxiety for those with the disease. Whether the person you're caring for lives at home or in long-term care, sticking to a regular routine will minimize stress.

Keeping things simple and cherishing the time with family will make the holiday period enjoyable and meaningful for everyone involved.

Keep these helpful hints handy:

### If you're caring for someone at home

- Plan ahead; have a family discussion and set realistic expectations. It may be a good time to start a new family tradition.
- Organize a series of small events instead of a day-long celebration. This will be less distressing to a family member who is in the later stages of dementia.
- Plan festivities around a time and day that is best for the person with dementia.
- Host family gatherings in a familiar place to avoid confusion.
- Limit family gatherings to small groups.
- Check your home for anything that might be dangerous. See safety tips.
- Avoid decorations that look like candy, fruit or other food items.
- Decorate your home gradually so the changes are less jarring for the person with dementia.
- Ask the person with dementia to help with holiday preparations; give them safe, manageable tasks like wrapping gifts. Tell them their help is valuable.
- Organize meaningful activities such as looking at old family photographs or singing favourite songs.
- Make a list of doctors and pharmacies that are open during the holidays in case of emergencies; be sure you know where the nearest emergency department is.
- If the person is taking medication, make sure they have enough to get through the holidays.
- Have a quiet area where the person can retreat if gatherings become too hectic. A family member or friend should keep them company so they won't feel isolated or excluded.
- Buy gifts that have meaning; reactions are hard to predict so don't be surprised if the person's reaction is less than enthusiastic.
- Don't overload their plate with rich food; overindulging can agitate the person with the disease. Consider making their favorite meal.



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## **If the person with dementia is a resident in long-term care**

Maintaining family traditions may be difficult if the person with dementia lives in long-term care. It's important to adjust your plans and expectations to suit the person with dementia as well as yourself. Whatever you do, remember to:

- Check ahead with the long-term care residence about holiday policies. If there's a party planned, try to attend to show support for the staff as well as your family member or friend.
- Talk to staff in advance; they usually know best what residents can handle.
- Make celebrations simple; it's your presence that counts.
- Bring a favourite book or piece of music and read or sing together.
- Do group activities like going for walks together.
- Reminisce about past holidays or events to help trigger happy memories.
- Ask the person if they'd like to involve other residents in your family celebrations.
- Plan shorter but more frequent visits and limit the number of visitors.
- Arrange for other family or friends to visit if you're unable to do so.
- Keep an eye on how the person reacts during gatherings and respond to their needs; don't overstay your visit if the person seems tired or distressed.

## **If you're a caregiver**

Pacing yourself and setting aside some quiet time during the holidays is important for your well being and that of the person you're caring for.

- Ask a friend or neighbour to help you with shopping or cooking a meal.
- Accept help if it's offered to you.
- If you have children, assign them specific tasks and explain to them how much difference their help makes.
- Set realistic goals; ask yourself how urgent the task is.
- Congratulate yourself; recognize the work you do and how much you mean to the person you're caring for.
- Use your local Alzheimer Society as your lifeline, if you need to talk to someone who understands the stress you are feeling.
- Find out what support is available in your community during the holidays.

**For practical advice and support this holiday season, contact your local Alzheimer Society.  
For crisis situations at night or on the weekend, call Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000).**