

Alzheimer families and the holidays: Tips to enjoy the season

The holidays are a time when family and friends come together and share memories, laughs and good cheer. But for families living with Alzheimer's, the holidays can also be a difficult time.

Caregiving responsibilities layered on top of keeping up with holiday traditions can take its toll on Alzheimer families, especially the caregiver. The person with Alzheimer's may also feel a sense of loss during the holidays.

With some planning and adjusted expectations, your celebrations can be filled with joy and magical moments to cherish forever.

Adjust your expectations

No one, including yourself, should expect you to maintain every holiday tradition or event.

- Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably manage
- Choose holiday activities and traditions that are most important to you
- Host a small family dinner instead of a throwing a big holiday party
- Consider serving a catered or takeout holiday meal. Many grocery stores and restaurants offer meals to go.
- Start a new tradition. Have a potluck dinner where family or friends each bring a dish

Involve the person in the festivities

There are many manageable activities the person and you can do together, such as:

- Wrap gifts
- Bake favorite holiday recipes together. The person can stir batter or decorate cookies.
- Set the table. Avoid centerpieces with candles and artificial fruits and berries that could be mistaken for edible snacks.

- Talk about events to include in a holiday letter
- Prepare simple foods such as appetizers
- Read cards you receive together
- Look through photo albums or scrapbooks. Reminisce about people in the pictures and past events.
- Watch a favorite holiday movie
- Sing favorite carols or read biblical passages

When the person lives in a care facility

A holiday is still a holiday whether it is celebrated at home or at a care facility. Here are some ways to celebrate together:

- Consider joining your loved one in any facility-planned holiday activities
- Bring a favorite holiday food to share
- Sing holiday songs. Ask if other residents can join in.
- Read a favorite holiday story or poem out loud