

## Holidays at Home or Away with your Alzheimer's Loved One

Holidays are a time for family gatherings and time-honored traditions. Though you may have to simplify which traditions your family chooses to do, it is important to still celebrate the spirit of the holidays. People living with Alzheimer's still enjoy celebrating holidays, even if they don't remember the meaning behind them. Here are a few ideas that can help you and your loved one manage the hustle and bustle surrounding the holidays:

**Manage routine.** Change of pace can be disruptive for someone with memory loss. Keeping the same daily routine will continue to add structure and balance to a busy day. Allow time for naps and relaxing.

**Less decorations.** Remember the less clutter, the better. No blinking lights, candles, or decorations that can appear to be edible, like fake fruits.

**Simplify traditions.** Don't throw huge family gatherings. Instead, invite over a few family members during your loved ones best time of day. Don't feel obligated to attend every family event either, it is best to consider which traditions to keep and which to bypass.

**House guests.** If you are expecting out of town visitors, show your loved one a picture of them every day for a week prior to their visit, discussing who they are. Set up a time for the two parties to talk on the phone, this will help your loved one put a voice with the picture and it will help the visitor know what is expected of them.

**Invite your loved one to help.** Continue with important traditions and engage your loved one to help with small things. For example, if your loved one used to like baking, help him/her measure ingredients for cookies or help mix the batter. If they like coloring eggs, have them decide on which colors to use.

**Reminisce.** Talk about old holiday memories, without questioning "Do you remember?" Have other family members that visit share holiday stories as well.

**Use one's senses.** Certain sounds, smells and sights can help your loved one remember the holiday. Sing holiday carols, read books aloud, bake holiday food and decorate a tree for Christmas to help trigger past memories.

**Avoid crowds.** It is best to leave your loved one at home while shopping at a mall, the loud noise can disorient the person. If you intend to go to a family get together or party, ask the host if there is a quiet room that you can take your loved one to if he/she needs a break. Invite your loved one to take part in activities, but know their limitations and their behaviors when they are ready to leave.

**Gift suggestions.** If someone is planning on buying your loved one a gift, request that they buy something practical like a photo album or clothes that are easy to remove like a sweater or elastic band pants. Also, suggest a safe-return bracelet or favorite music or movies. Avoid buying anything harmful like knives, razors or electronics, or games that are too challenging to complete.

If you are asked what you want for a gift, suggest items like gift certificates to the spa, so you can indulge yourself in an after holiday relaxation massage or pedicure. Cleaning services is also a good gift to request because it will take some of your responsibilities of keeping your home tidy off of you for awhile. Think of ideas that will reduce stress or allow you some time alone.

As a caregiver it is important to realize your limits. Don't stress yourself out trying to make the holidays like they once were. Let your family members know of the changes that your loved one is going through and scale things back from now on. Don't be afraid to ask others for help.