

# 10 Holiday Survival Tips



The holidays are just around the corner. Families are gathering for Thanksgiving, Hanukah, and Christmas, sharing laughter and happy memories. But for families coping with Alzheimer's, the holidays can be bittersweet times, filled with stress and frustration. Festivities can agitate, confuse, and over stimulate persons with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Meanwhile, caregivers can feel anxious, frustrated, and lonely – leading to stress and depression. The Alzheimer's Association - Florida Gulf Coast Chapter- has developed 10 Holiday Survival Tips for families coping with Alzheimer's.

## **Tip 1 - Planning can avoid holiday stress**

Individuals who experience the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who have given little thought to the challenges they will encounter. Consider ahead of time what may be expected of you, both socially and emotionally.

- Discuss holiday celebrations with relatives and close friends in advance.
- Plan to maintain a regular routine while trying to provide a pleasant, meaningful and calm holiday event.
- Celebrate early in the day or have a noon meal rather than a late dinner.

## **Tip 2 – Take care of yourself (caregiver)**

Remember, the holidays are opportunities to share time with people you love. Try to make these celebrations easy on yourself and with the person with Alzheimer's disease so that you may concentrate on enjoying your time together.

- Set limits by telling family and friends that you intend to control stress this holiday season.
- Maintain a positive mental attitude.
- Ask for assistance for you and your loved one.
- Attend an Alzheimer's Association support group that will allow you discuss ways to overcome holiday stress.
- Prepare to deal with post-holiday letdown. Arrange for in-home care (respite care) so you can enjoy a movie or lunch with a friend and reduce post-holiday stress.

### **Tip 3 – Prepare the person with Alzheimer’s for the family gathering**

Preparing your loved one for the upcoming holiday events can allow both of you to enjoy the warmth of the season.

- Talk about and show photos of family members and friends who will be visiting.
- Have a “quiet” room in case things get too hectic.
- Play familiar music and serve favorite traditional holiday foods.
- Schedule naps, especially if the person usually takes naps.
- Schedule family and friends visit times

### **Tip 4 – Prepare family members and friends**

Preparing families and friends with an honest appraisal of the person’s condition can help avoid uncomfortable or harmful situations.

- Familiarize family members and friends with behaviors and condition changes.
- Recommend practical and useful gifts. (See Tip 7)
- Remind family and friends the best way to communicate with a person with dementia. (See Tip 6)

### **Tip 5 – Involve everyone when selecting activities**

Involve everyone in holiday activities including the person with dementia.

- Consider taking walks, icing cookies, telling stories, doing chores, making a memory book or family tree, or keeping a journal.
- To encourage conversation, place magazines, scrapbooks, or photo albums in reach; play music to prompt dancing or other kinds of exercise.
- Encourage young family members to participate in simple and familiar activities with the person.

### **Tip 6 – Communicate with success**

Alzheimer’s can diminish a person’s ability to communicate. These tips may help you understand each other.

- Be calm and supportive if the person has trouble communicating.
- Speak slowly with a relaxed tone.
- Avoid criticism. For example, when someone forgets a recent conversation, avoid saying, “Don’t you remember?”
- Address the person by name.
- Be patient, flexible, and do not argue with the person with Alzheimer’s

## **Tip 7 -- Smart gift giving**

- Encourage family and friends to give useful, practical gifts for the person such as identification bracelet (available through Medic Alert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®). Other gifts may include comfortable easy-to-remove clothing, audiotapes of favorite music, videos, and photo albums.
- Advise others not to give gifts such as dangerous tools or instruments, utensils, challenging board games, complicated electronic equipment, or pets.
- If possible, involve the person in giving gifts. For example, someone who once enjoyed cooking may enjoy baking cookies, or buy the gift and allow the person to wrap it.

## **Tip 8 – Safe environment in the home**

Persons with dementia may experience changes in judgment. This behavior may lead to confusion, frustration, or wandering. Consider these tips to reduce the risk of injury and situations that could be confusing to someone with dementia.

- Assign a “buddy” to watch out for the person to ensure their comfort.
- Arrange ample space for walking side-by-side, for wheelchairs, and walkers. Keep walking areas clear.
- Consider seating options so the person with Alzheimer's can best focus on conversation and be least distracted.
- Don't serve alcohol, which may lead to inappropriate behavior or interactions with medications.
- Accommodate changes in vision. Place contrasting-color rugs in front of doors or steps. Avoid dark-colored rugs that may appear to be “holes.”
- Limit access to places where injuries occur, such as a kitchen or stairwell. Check temperature of water and food.
  
- Create even level of lighting; avoid blinking lights.
- Keep decorations simple; avoid using candies, artificial fruits/vegetables, or other edibles as decorations.
- Supervise in taking medicine.
- Keep emergency phone numbers and a list of medications handy.

**Tip 9 -- Travel wisely**

The following suggestions may ensure a positive traveling experience:

- Never leave the person alone.
- Use familiar modes of transportation and avoid peak travel times.
- Keep plans simple and maintain daily routines as much as possible.
- Allow extra time to avoid the stress of rushing.
- Advise service and hospitality staff that you are traveling with someone with dementia and about the person's behaviors and special needs.
- Arrange for services, such as wheelchairs, ahead of time.
- Provide identification items such as a Medic Alert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®) bracelet and clothing labels.

**Tip 10 – Reliable sources of support**

Families can call the Alzheimer's Association at 727-578-2558 or the 24-hour Helpline at 1-800-772-8672 to answer questions about warning signs and to assist persons with dementia and caregivers. The Helpline will be open all Christmas day and New Year day, as well as year round.