

Alzheimer's: Planning for the holidays

Holidays can be bittersweet for families affected by Alzheimer's. Consider simple tips to make the holidays enjoyable for everyone.

[By Mayo Clinic staff](#)

Alzheimer's disease affects both family and community life. Holiday observances are no exception. Holiday memories from before your loved one developed Alzheimer's may darken an otherwise joyful season — and worries about how your loved one's condition may disrupt your family's plans can overshadow the simple pleasure of being together. Rather than dwell on how much things have changed or worry about what might go wrong, focus on making the holidays as enjoyable as possible.

Keep it simple at home

If you're caring for a loved one who has Alzheimer's at home:

- **Make preparations together.** If you bake, your loved one may be able to participate by measuring flour, stirring batter or rolling dough. You may find it meaningful to open holiday cards or wrap gifts together. Remember to concentrate on the process, rather than the result.
- **Tone down your decorations.** Blinking lights and large decorative displays can cause disorientation. Avoid lighted candles and other safety hazards, as well as decorations that could be mistaken for edible treats — such as artificial fruits.
- **Host quiet, slow-paced gatherings.** Music, conversation and meal preparation all add to the noise and stimulation of an event. Yet for a person who has Alzheimer's, a calm, quiet environment usually is best. Keep daily routines in place as much as possible and, as needed, provide your loved one a place to rest during family get-togethers.

Be practical away from home

If your loved one lives in a nursing home or other facility:

- **Celebrate in the most familiar setting.** For many people who have Alzheimer's, a change of environment — even a visit home — causes anxiety. Instead of creating that disruption, consider holding a small family celebration at the facility. You might also participate in holiday activities planned for the residents.
- **Minimize visitor traffic.** Arrange for a few family members to drop in on different days. Even if your loved one isn't sure who's who, two or three familiar faces are likely to be welcome, while nine or 10 may be overwhelming.
- **Schedule visits at your loved one's best time of day.** People who have Alzheimer's tire easily, especially as the disease progresses. Your loved one may appreciate morning and lunchtime visitors more than those in the afternoon or evening.

Care for yourself

Consider your needs, as well as those of your loved one. To manage your expectations of yourself:

- **Pick and choose.** Decide which holiday activities and traditions are most important, then focus on what you enjoy. Remember that you can't do it all.
- **Simplify.** Bake fewer cookies. Buy fewer gifts. Don't feel pressured to display all of your holiday decorations or include a handwritten note with each holiday card. Ask others to provide portions of holiday meals.
- **Delegate.** Remember family members and friends who've offered their assistance. Let them help with cleaning, addressing cards and shopping for gifts. Ask if one of your children or a close friend could stay with your loved one while you go to a holiday party.

Trust your instincts

As a caregiver, you know your loved one's abilities best. You also know what's most likely to agitate or upset your loved one. Resist pressure to celebrate the way others may expect you to. Remember, you can't control the progress of Alzheimer's or protect your loved one from all distress — but by planning and setting firm boundaries, you can avoid needless holiday stress and enjoy the warmth of the season.

Information provided by
www.mayoclinic.com

REMEMBER:
Pare down your plans. **Slow the pace** of the holiday activity to allow your loved one to enjoy it. **Simplify** tasks. **Ask** for help. **Keep breathing** – long deep breathes are a brain calming signal.

