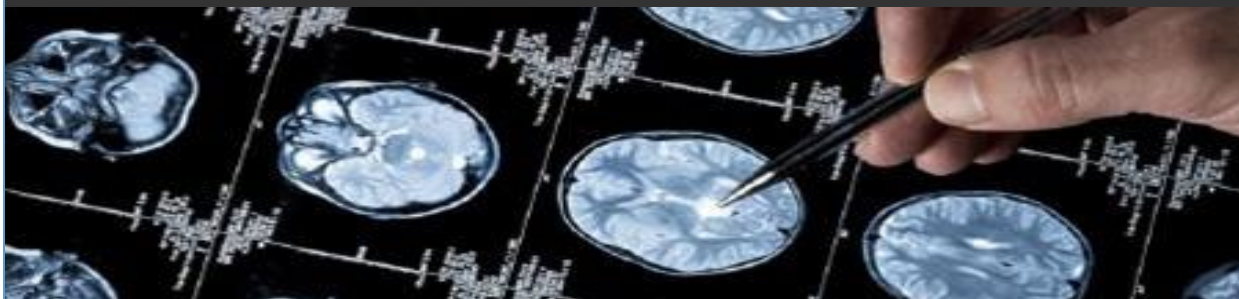


Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC)



Newsletter 25

Happy Holidays from the ADRC! We would like to share information from the Alzheimer's Association about dealing with the holidays. The holidays are often filled with opportunities for togetherness, sharing, laughter and memories. But they can also bring stress, disappointment and sadness. A person living with Alzheimer's or another dementia may feel a special sense of loss during the holidays because of the changes they have experienced. At the same time, caregivers may feel overwhelmed maintaining traditions while providing care.

Holidays

In the early stage, a person living with Alzheimer's may experience minor changes. Some may withdraw and be less comfortable socializing, while others may relish seeing family and friends as before. The key is to communicate and discuss options. A simple "How are you doing?" or "How are you coping with everything?" may be appreciated. Plan the holidays together, focusing on the things that bring happiness and letting go of activities that seem overwhelming or stressful. As the disease progresses into the middle and late stages, review your holiday plans to ensure they are still a good fit. Everyone is unique and finding a plan that works can involve trial and error. The following tips may help you make the holidays easier and happier occasions.

Adjust expectations.

- Call a face-to-face meeting or arrange for a group discussion via telephone, video chat or email for family and friends to discuss holiday celebrations. Make sure that everyone understands your caregiving situation and has realistic expectations about what you can and cannot do.
- Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably manage. If you've always invited 15 to 20 people to your home, consider inviting five for a simpler meal. Think about having a potluck dinner, asking someone to order and bring dinner, or asking others to host.
- Familiarize others with your situation by writing a letter or email.

Involve the person living with Alzheimer's.

- Involve the person in safe, manageable holiday preparation activities that they enjoy. Ask them to help you prepare food, wrap packages, help decorate or set the table. (Avoid using candies, artificial fruits and vegetables as decorations because a person living with dementia might confuse them with real food. Blinking lights may also confuse the person.)
- Maintain the person's normal routine as much as possible, so that holiday preparations don't become disruptive or confusing.
- Build on traditions and memories. Your family member may find comfort in going caroling, but you may also experiment with new traditions that might be less stressful or a better fit with your caregiving responsibilities, such as watching seasonal movies.

Adapt gift giving.

- Advise people not to give gifts such as dangerous tools or instruments, utensils, challenging board games, complicated electronic equipment or pets.
- Depending on the person's abilities and preferences, involve them in gift-giving. For example, someone who once enjoyed baking may enjoy helping to make cookies and pack them in tins or boxes. Or you may want to buy the gift so that the person can wrap it.
- If friends or family members ask you what you'd like for a gift, you might suggest a gift certificate or something that will help make things easier, like housecleaning; lawn, handyman or laundry services; restaurant gift cards; or a scheduled visit with the person for an afternoon so you can have some time off.

Visit alz.org/holidays to learn more.

Thank for your interest in the Yale ADRC. For more information on our studies or to participate in studies please call or visit our website.

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