

# Memory Moment

*Preparing for the holidays*

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Years ago, as we continued seeing the changes Alzheimer's brought to my grandma, our family began taking over tasks to help her prepare for the holidays. Even though she gradually let other family members take over most of the cooking, cleaning, and decorating, she was always still the center of the party as it was in her own home. I'll never forget the Christmas party a couple of years after my grandma was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. We had a lovely day celebrating with our big family. As the day went on however and turned into night, the commotion and activity started to make her upset and act unlike her usual self. My sweet, kind grandmother began getting angry and lashing out, clearly exhausted from the day. If my family and I would have known then what we do know, we would have done things a little bit differently, to help her function as best as possible. While living with Alzheimer's and related dementia changes the holidays, they can still be enjoyable and meaningful. Below are some tips from our family to yours on helpful things to remember this holiday season.

## **Try sticking to the usual routine as much as possible.**

Routine is the best for a person living with Alzheimer's or related dementia. When preparing for a holiday, try to stick to your loved one's regular routine as much as possible. Having a similar waking/sleeping schedule, mealtimes, and activity can make a difference in how your loved one handles the extra commotion of the day. Try to plan holidays around when your loved one might be at 'their best' during the day.

## **In addition to routine, having 'quiet time' is beneficial.**

In a normal day, we usually have some time by ourselves to relax. Holidays are usually not filled with 'quiet time' and instead with laughs and time with loved ones. Although these are welcome, a person living with Alzheimer's really does need time to recharge and be out of the hustle and bustle of the holidays. Enlist the help of some family members who can take the lead in recognizing when some quiet time is necessary.

## **Hold on to holiday traditions, but be flexible to change.**

Thinking creatively, you can still include your loved one in treasured holiday traditions. It's very important to modify activities to make them appropriate yet meaningful for someone's level of cognitive functioning. For instance, baking sugar cookies or goodies is a cherished holiday tradition for many. Depending on how your loved one's dementia has progressed, sequencing the entire task of baking sugar cookies (purchasing baking items,

making sugar cookie dough, cutting out designs, and icing cookies) may be too much for a person living with Alzheimer's/related dementia to enjoy and complete successfully. Modifying an activity for the level of your loved one's impairment can be helpful in activities like making sugar cookies. Instead of completing the whole process, a family and their loved one could just ice the sugar cookies together. Holidays are full of traditions, but it is important to remember that the length or difficulty of an activity might need to be changed for your loved one to get the most enjoyment.

### **Rely on each other.**

Holidays are very emotional times for families and friends, especially when remembering loved ones no longer celebrating with them. It is normal to grieve what your loved one may be losing due to Alzheimer's or related dementia. For family who lives out of town, the shock of seeing the decline in their loved one may be at the forefront of the holiday as they might not see the decline as often as someone who lives nearby. Rely on each other for support. Holidays may look different now, but with love and support from those you care for most, you can still hold on to cherished traditions and make new memories with your loved one.

*Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at [www.effinghamalz.org](http://www.effinghamalz.org). If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.*