

Holidays & Alzheimer's

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I'll never forget the Christmas party a couple of years after my grandma was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. After her diagnosis, the previous years saw her gradually let other family members take over most of the cooking, cleaning, decorating, etc. but she was always still the center of the party as it was in her own home. 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. If my family and I would have known then what we do now, we would have done things a little bit differently. Below are some tips from our family to yours on helpful things to remember this holiday season.

Try to stick to the usual routine as much as possible.

Routine is the best for a person living with Alzheimer's or related dementia. What I usually suggest for families caring for a loved one when it comes to preparing for a holiday, try to stick to your loved one's regular routine as possible. Having the same waking/sleeping schedule, similar mealtimes can really make a difference in how your loved one can handle 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 their 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.

A couple months ago, I talked about the importance of modifying activities so that your loved one is still able to be part of your holiday traditions. The example I gave in that article fits nicely for our discussion today. Making sugar cookies or other baking items is a cherished holiday tradition for many. Depending on how your loved one's dementia has progressed the complete list of tasks 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 as a fun afternoon. 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 be grieving what your loved one may be losing due to Alzheimer's or related dementia, and to family who lives out of town, the shock of seeing the decline in their loved one may be at the forefront of the holiday. For family members or friends who live far, they might not be able to see the decline as often as someone who lives nearby. Consider having a conversation before they visit on changes you have seen since their last visit. 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.

For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nobsch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.