

Alzheimer's disease and the holidays

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The holidays can be a special time, but may present challenges for those with dementia and their loved ones. Travel is fatiguing, being in a new location is disorienting, meeting new people while trying to recall names of relatives and friends is taxing, and following a conversation in a room filled with distractions, music, and laughter may be overwhelming.

Baylor College of Medicine's Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders Center experts have some tips to help make these moments as peaceful and meaningful as possible:

- Be prepared to adjust your expectations based on your loved one's tolerance for change. The sights, sounds and smells of the holiday stimulate the senses, while social demands and changes in routine and environment can trigger a [stress response](#). If your loved one grows restless or anxious, take a "time out" and move to a quiet part of the house together, sit outside or take a walk together.
- Instead of expecting your loved one to mingle in a crowd, choose a quiet, comfortable spot and have family members approach individually. One-on-one conversations are easier for your loved one than multiway discussions.
- Avoid quizzing your loved one. Don't test their memory, for example, "Do you remember who this is?" Instead, introduce each person by name and relationship i.e., "This is Jane, your niece from Boston."
- Include your loved one in the day's events. Give them a task: Fold napkins, set the table, sort silverware, arrange flowers or wrap gifts. Value their participation over their performance of any task.
- Rely on [reminiscence](#). Your loved one's [memory](#) for things long past is stronger than short-term recall. Sing classic holiday songs, ask about childhood memories, tell familiar stories.
- Adhere to routine as much as possible. If a short nap, special TV show, or midday walk is customary for your loved one, try to incorporate this wherever you are celebrating. This includes the taking of medications.
- Be mindful of your own stress level and how you are communicating. Emotions are infectious, and you may "transfer" your [mood](#) to your loved one. If you become frustrated, stressed

or anxious, so does the person you are caring for. If you need help, ask for it.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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