

Make this Halloween a safe one for people with dementia

October 30 2023, by Cara Murez



Halloween is often frightening for loved ones who have dementia, but there are ways to keep it safe and not scary.

"Halloween can be very challenging and stressful for someone with dementia because of how these illnesses impact the brain. Scary sights, frightful sounds and costumed strangers knocking on the door can cause anxiety, fear and agitation," said Jennifer Reeder, director of educational and [social services](#) for the Alzheimer's Foundation of America.

"Taking a few simple steps can help families and [friends](#) keep the 'Happy' in 'Happy Halloween' for their loved ones with dementia on Oct. 31," she said in a foundation news release.

You can proactively address stress by playing relaxing music, providing verbal and physical reassurance and engaging in a quiet activity together, like reading. Explain the nature of Halloween to your loved one, if it seems appropriate, the association suggests.

Here are some other tips

Don't use interactive or scary decorations. Those that talk or scream when someone walks by, or with flashing or flickering lights, can be scary for someone living with dementia. It may make them try to wander.

Fake skeletons, monsters, witches, cobwebs and tombstones, even if non-interactive, could also be scary. Decorate instead with less scary objects, such as pumpkins and fall leaves.

Adapt the celebration to meet your loved one's needs. Replace candy with fruit or another healthy snack. Too much sugar can increase agitation in someone with dementia.

It's still OK to be festive. Reminisce by looking at old photos of Halloween events. Paint pumpkins together. Watch a non-threatening program about Halloween if your loved one seems interested. Or join a

non-threatening celebration at a [community center](#).

Don't leave your loved one alone while you give out candy. It can be frightening to see costumed strangers continually knocking on the door.

If the person with [dementia](#) wants to interact with trick or treaters by giving out candy, provide assistance.

You can also keep candy outside the [door](#) with a note for trick or treaters to "please take one."

Leave inside and outside lights on for safety.

Don't invite trick or treaters into your house. This can possibly create disorientation for your loved one and may pose a safety risk.

But you can invite a small number of friends, family or neighbors to stop by for refreshments, if your loved one enjoys this holiday and wants to participate.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [Alzheimer's disease](#).

SOURCE: Alzheimer's Foundation of America, news release, Oct. 24, 2023

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