

Be prepared when Alzheimer's care is part of the holidays

Susan Adams-Price 9:38 a.m. EST November 14, 2016



(Photo: Provided)

This time of year is filled with family get-togethers, and while family and holidays go together like turkey and stuffing, these gatherings can also be very stressful. All of the chaos, preparation and travel can bring frustration and anxiety that clouds what the holidays are all about — celebration, gratitude and being with loved ones. And for caregivers, the effects of Alzheimer's or dementia can complicate gatherings for families, as well as the person coping with the disease.

According to the Alzheimer's Association (<https://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-caregiver-stress-burnout.asp>), caregivers' stress can stem from feeling pressure to uphold previous family traditions, or from feeling weary of how family members may react to the newfound behavior changes of a loved one with Alzheimer's. The good news, however, is that holidays can also provide an exclusive opportunity for family members to communicate with and support one another, allowing you to get back to what the holidays are all about.

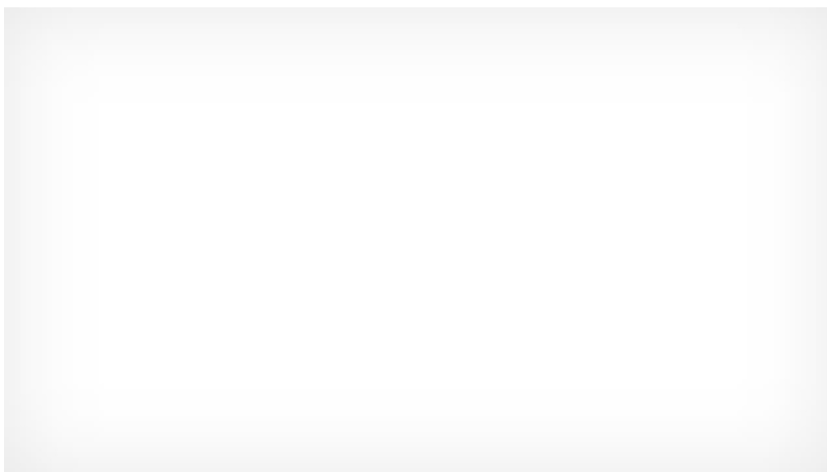
Here are five things you can do as a caregiver to make the holidays more enjoyable:

Adjust expectations: First explain your role as a caregiver to other family members, reveal the new behaviors of the family member with Alzheimer's disease, and try to set realistic goals for celebrations. Maybe consider having a potluck dinner to lessen some of your responsibilities or suggest another family member host the festivities.

Take the opportunity to communicate: The [Family Caregiver Alliance](https://www.caregiver.org/) (<https://www.caregiver.org/>) recommends engaging in honest conversation with family members about the truths of your caregiving duties. This offers a chance for others to offer assistance or comfort to ease your responsibilities for the time being.

Embrace new traditions and gift-giving ideas: The [Alzheimer's Association of Colorado](http://www.alz.org/documents/colorado/Holiday_Guide_for_Alzheimers_Caregivers(2).pdf) ([http://www.alz.org/documents/colorado/Holiday_Guide_for_Alzheimers_Caregivers\(2\).pdf](http://www.alz.org/documents/colorado/Holiday_Guide_for_Alzheimers_Caregivers(2).pdf)) offers an idea in which family members wear name tags and make a game out of it. Gifts for the family member with the disease can include comfortable clothing, useful gifts like an identification bracelet, or photo albums. A great gift for a caregiver is to simply offer your time or assistance, or perhaps a trip to the day spa.

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Take good care of yourself: Amid the many hectic duties of being a caregiver, it may seem hard to dedicate time to maintaining your personal happiness. [Angela Lunde with Mayo Clinic Health](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/expert-blog/alzheimers-caregivers/bgp-20055892) (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/expert-blog/alzheimers-caregivers/bgp-20055892>) strongly urges Alzheimer's caregivers to try and set aside 15 minutes a day to "turn your attention inward and focus your mind on the present moment." Meditation can provide a much-needed mental break and help prevent dwelling on negative thoughts.

Give thanks: A final tip for a happier holiday season is to write a thank-you note to family members who have spent time with you and your loved one.

This positive reinforcement may encourage future visits and support, both of which are very important for you and your loved one.

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Whether this is your first holiday season caring for someone with Alzheimer's, or if it is one of many, I hope these tips make this time around more joyous and fulfilling for you and your loved ones.

This Week's Nextpert

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