Coping With Alzheimer’s Over the Holidays

by BECKY YOUNG

10 Tips to Help a Person With Alzheimer’s Enjoy Christmas

Christmas can be a really stressful time for people with Alzheimer’s and their families. It typically involves a disruption to their normal routine, interactions with their relatives, and crowded activities.

All these can be difficult to cope with when you have Alzheimer’s and therefore can bring forth some unusual behaviors that are difficult for family members to cope with. Here are 10 tips on how to support relatives with Alzheimer’s this Christmas, to try and help make sure you all still have a magical time.

1. Holiday Baking

Making the Christmas cakes, cookies, and mince pies is a great way of getting people, young and old, involved in the festivities. Whether that is stirring, adding ingredients or sharing their recipes, it’ll still be fun to get them involved.

Decorating the cake or cookies is a safe and creative way for everyone to take part!

2. Arts and Crafts

What could be better than getting everyone together and having fun over the arts and crafts table?

Christmas cards and table centerpieces are practical and easy to make. It takes little dexterity and is a perfect way to engage a person with Alzheimer’s in the Christmas preparations.

3. Music

Singing and music are particularly good at this time of year. Language skills can be affected as Alzheimer’s progresses, but often people who have communication difficulties will enjoy singing along to seasonal music or tap out the beat.

4. Dressing the Tree

Decorating the tree is another good way to spend family time. For many families, there are decorations that have special meanings and can bring back lots of memories.

Retro ornaments are very big this year — you may like to buy some that remind you of ones your family has had in the past.

5. Be Prepared

Make a list of useful telephone numbers, such as out of hours medical services. Book repeat prescriptions or appointments well in advance and make sure your relative has packed whatever medication or medical support aids they will need if they are going to be away.

6. Take Time Out

The run-up to Christmas can be stressful for caregivers, particularly if they have their own family to look after. Caregivers should try to make time for themselves and not feel guilty or strive for perfection.

There is a number of wellbeing centers offering daytime respite services and providing expert care and support for people living with Alzheimer's on a daily or hourly basis. Utilize these to ensure that you don't become overloaded.

7. Stick With Tradition

On Christmas morning, decades of seasonal memories can reawaken if you stick to your traditional Christmas. Go to church if that is what your family does, open stockings — just enjoy the moment.

Have a quiet place ready for your loved one to go, as the hurly-burly of present opening, noisy toys and over-excited youngsters can prove too much for someone whose senses have changed.

8. Keep It Simple

Try to keep table settings as simple as possible to limit confusion. Sometimes a person with Alzheimer's can misinterpret decorations as food.

Meal times may need to be flexible if a nap is needed. If special cutlery is required, ensure you have it on hand.

9. Serve Dinner

Plate up dinner for the person with Alzheimer's if they have impairments to their eyesight, as it may be hard for them to negotiate the serving dishes. Also try to use a plate color that contrasts against the food — this makes it easier to see and avoids confusion and anxiety.

Do not be offended if they do not eat a great deal — appetites can decline with Alzheimer's.

10. Play Familiar Games

In the early stages of Alzheimer's, people can usually still follow the rules of card and board games they have played before, so it could be time to get out some of the old family favorites. If their Alzheimer's is more advanced, new games are definitely best avoided.