



Top Tips for Thanksgiving With Alzheimer's

by ANGELA FINLAY

Enjoying Thanksgiving With Alzheimer's

Whether you are worried about your own Alzheimer's symptoms, or your concern lies in the behaviours of a close family member, there are ways to overcome the worry, challenge, and sadness that can overshadow Thanksgiving festivities. The first step is to stay positive and proactive, and then adjust your traditions in a few clever ways to make things easier on the whole family.

Focus on Love and Unity

Thanksgiving is a time for fun and indulgence, but there's far more to the occasion than food and football. This is often the first big gathering of the holiday season, and you can set the standard for the winter events to come by encouraging a positive and loving environment. In the end, nurture helps everyone feel safe, loved and happy.

- **Be a loving guide** – Positive reinforcement is a very powerful tool to rise above the discomforts of Alzheimer's. Smiling, hugging, hand touching and laughing can immediately elevate the mood in the room, and good vibes are infectious. Throughout the day, be sure to physically and sympathetically connect with your loved one to assure them everything is safe and good.
- **Let others in** – Holidays can be emotionally and physically exhausting when you're the partner or primary caregiver of someone with Alzheimer's. You deserve to stay calm and healthy, too, so lower your expectations of yourself and let others help out where they can. If they're not sure how to help, gently explain how they can contribute.
- **Encourage socialization** – As Alzheimer's progresses, it can be easy to look back with longing, and lament the way things are now. But holiday gatherings can be enormously enriching for everyone – even those with failing memories and personality changes. If people are hesitant to visit, explain that it would be a great way to reconnect and forge some new family traditions. Use the occasion to strengthen the sense of family identity rather than gingerly sidestepping the new challenges.

Remember, traditions are nice, but it's not the end of the world if they need to change – the important part of the holiday is the group of people involved. You can ensure a more comfortable atmosphere for everyone if you keep noise and music to a minimum, and have some distractions on hand to engage the Alzheimer's sufferer if they begin to get agitated or confused.

Reduce the Pressure

Forgetfulness, confusion and cognitive troubles are frustrating at the best of times, but they can be nearly impossible to handle when you're juggling all the obligations of a holiday gathering. It can be difficult to give up control, but the best idea may be to let someone else take over the hosting duties this year, or else have a backup plan in case your loved one cannot handle the responsibilities they insist on taking.

- **Prepare the guests** – Challenging social situations can be rough for a person with Alzheimer's and for

the people around them. Let visitors know in advance what changes in appearance and behaviour they can expect, and remind them to be gentle in their conversation and avoid pressing questions. Rest assured that the day will go better when everyone is on the same page from the beginning.

- **Arrange a wide variety of small main dishes** – If you're worried that the turkey will be forgotten or the dessert may fail to make it to the table intact, why not parcel out the meal and delegate to every family member? Instead of one big bird, request a few different "main courses", along with a selection of sweets and lots of simple salads and sides. If your loved one does insist on cooking up a big roast in the end, that's fine – you'll just have more leftovers.

It can be worrying and awkward to force conversation with an Alzheimer's patient who doesn't want to talk, and that could escalate into an anxious scenario. Gather a selection of non-verbal activities and references ahead of time to help guests relate, and keep your loved one happy and engaged: scrapbooks, photo albums, magazines and very simple puzzles can be great ways to connect meaningfully and make for a more enjoyable holiday.