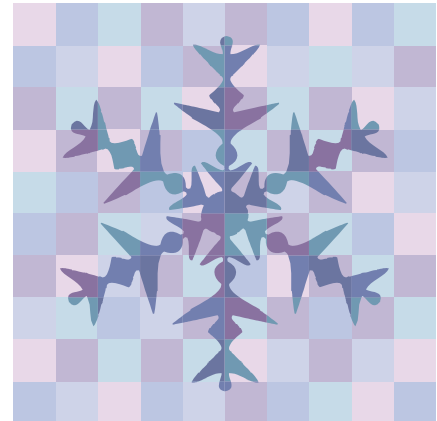


## Special Holiday Edition of In Touch

*Holidays can be bittersweet for caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia. While traditions may bring happiness and comfort, challenges associated with the disease can make this time of year feel overwhelming. This special edition of In Touch provides information and practical tips for making this season enjoyable for you, the person with dementia, and your family. We hope that it will encourage you to find an all-important balance between rest and activity and inspire you to continue your traditions, start new ones, or take pleasure in just being in the moment.*



## Supporting a Person with Dementia During the Holidays

Whether the person you are caring for is experiencing moderate or more advanced symptoms of dementia, there are still many ways to include them in your celebrations and traditions. Below are some examples of how to support a person with dementia throughout the holidays and find meaningful activities for them to engage in.

- Try to involve the person in your own activities and tasks. For example, before a holiday meal, ask for help with simple chores such as washing vegetables or setting the table. Let the person know their help is valued.
- The person may have happy memories of previous celebrations that you can reminisce about together. Looking at old photos and telling stories may be comforting.
- At larger gatherings try to have a space available where the person can rest, be alone, or spend some time with a smaller number of people.

If the person lives in a residential care facility, you may be considering bringing them home for the holidays.

- Keep in mind that for some people with dementia, a change of environment can be stressful and cause confusion or anxiety.
- If they do come home, try to simplify things. For example, ask visitors to come in small groups and at a time of day that is best for the person.
- If you are concerned about how the person with dementia might cope with a visit home, consider having a test visit shortly before the holidays.
- If the person cannot come home, ask residential care staff what they will be doing to help residents celebrate and if you can do anything to help.

Source: Alzheimer's Society of U.K.

## Surviving the Holidays

For most families, regardless of faith or culture, holidays are a time of joy and togetherness, a time for celebrating, sharing and enjoying one another's company. Holidays can also be stressful, even at the best of times. When you're caring for a person with dementia, the holiday season can be especially difficult for all kinds of reasons.

Typical stressors at this time of year include:

- Dealing with the memories of past holidays, and the unexpected feelings and emotions these memories cause.
- Feeling overwhelmed with maintaining holiday traditions while trying to keep up with caregiving responsibilities.
- Dealing with visitors who don't feel comfortable relating to a person with dementia.
- Expecting too much of yourself or others.
- Feeling guilty for not being able to get into the holiday spirit.



The person you're caring for may also have a difficult time coping with the holiday season. Perhaps he or she feels a particular sense of loss at this time of year or finds the disruption in routine caused by holiday activities distressing.

*So..what can you do to survive the holiday season?*

### Adjust expectations

Talk to family members and friends to make sure they understand your situation and that their expectations are realistic. Prepare them for the changes they will notice, and let them know that the person may behave in unpredictable ways. For example, he or she may ask the same question over and over, or may become agitated if there is too much sensory stimulation. Remind family and friends that the person may have trouble remembering names and faces, and suggest they introduce themselves. Perhaps as a group you can all make plans to adapt your traditional activities to suit the needs of your family member with dementia.

### Minimize holiday stress

This is obviously much easier said than done. However, there are things you can do to help yourself get through the holiday season more smoothly.

- Give yourself permission to take a break. You deserve it. Remind yourself that you can only provide good care if you're taking good care of yourself.
- Look after yourself. Eat healthily and try to get enough sleep and exercise.
- When family members offer to help, accept. If they don't offer, don't be afraid to ask.
- Set realistic goals and expectations.
- Be selective. Choose the holiday activities and traditions that mean the most to you and to your family member.
- Keep it simple. For example, try to do all of your gift shopping in one store, attend the smaller family gatherings, invite only a few guests at a time.
- Give yourself permission to enjoy the holidays. Spend time with your friends and family, even if the person you're caring for can't participate.
- Keep to your regular routine as much as possible.

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- Recognize that you may feel lonely, angry, sad or disappointed before, during and after the holidays. These feelings are normal, and they don't mean you love the person with dementia any less. If you are concerned about depression, it is important to speak to your doctor.

**Involve the person with dementia**

When you can, involve the person in the holiday preparations. You know best what activities he or she is capable of and interested in. Try doing some of the following activities together:

- Reading the cards you receive and reminiscing about the senders
- Wrapping presents
- Hanging decorations
- Packing cookies in tins for gifts
- Listening to music and singing songs
- Driving around in the evening to look at the holiday lights

**Easy Holiday Recipe**

*Here is an easy recipe that you and the person you are caring for can make together. Requires no oven, stovetop, or knives (just the microwave). Perfect for holiday parties!*

**Peanut Butter Clusters**

Ingredients:

- 10 ounces Peanut Butter Chips
- 1/2 cup dry-roasted, unsalted peanuts
- 1/2 cup regular oats, uncooked
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Directions:

Microwave chips in a bowl on high power until melted, about 1<sup>1/2</sup> minutes. Stir. Add remaining ingredients; mix thoroughly. Using your hands, firmly roll into 1-inch balls. Cool. Makes 3 dozen clusters.

**Visiting Preparation Tip**

As a caregiver, you may be concerned about having visitors during the holiday season, especially if the person with dementia has experienced significant changes in their behaviour and ability to communicate. One way to prepare your family and friends for visits is to familiarize them with your situation by writing a letter or email with information such as:

*I'm writing this to let you know how things are going at our home. While we're looking forward to your visit, we thought it might be helpful if you understood our current situation before you arrive.*

*You may notice that \_\_\_ has changed since you last saw him/her. Among the changes you may notice are \_\_\_. I've enclosed a picture so you know how \_\_\_ looks now.*

*Because \_\_\_ sometimes has problems remembering and thinking clearly, his/her behaviour has changed.*

*Please understand that \_\_\_ may not remember who you are and may confuse you with someone else. Please don't feel offended by this. He/she appreciates your being with us and so do I.*

*Please treat \_\_\_ as you would any person. A warm smile and a gentle touch on \_\_\_'s shoulder or hand will be appreciated more than you know.*

*I would ask that you call before you come to visit or when you're nearby so we can prepare for your arrival. Caregiving is a tough job, and I'm doing the very best I can. With your help and support, we can create a holiday memory that we'll treasure.*



*Adapted from Alzheimer Association fact sheet – "Holidays"*

## Holiday Checklist

This list is particularly helpful for caregivers who have recently lost a loved one or for those whose loved one has recently moved to a care facility. Consider whether this is a good time to make some changes that benefit you and help restore your health and wellbeing.

**Underline** what you would traditionally do and then **circle** what you want to do this year. Share this with your family and have them do one of their own and compare notes.

### Cards:

- Mail as usual
- Shorten your list
- Include a “holiday letter”
- Elect to skip this year



### Shopping:

- Shop as usual
- Give cash
- Ask for help
- Shop early
- Make your gifts
- Give baked goods
- Ask for help wrapping gifts
- Do not exchange gifts now but perhaps later
- Make a shopping list before you go out

### Traditions:

- Keep the old traditions
- Attend holiday parties
- Don't attend holiday parties
- Bake the usual holiday foods
- Buy the usual holiday foods
- Bake but modify what you usually do
- Attend religious services
- Do not attend religious services
- Attend religious services at a different time
- Visit your family member with dementia at their new residence
- Spend quiet time alone
- Open gifts early
- Open gifts on usual day

### Decorations:

- Decorate as usual
- Ask for help
- Let others do it
- Make changes, such as an artificial tree instead of a real one
- Have a special decoration for the person with dementia
- Eliminate some or all decorations

### Holiday Music:

- Enjoy as usual
- Avoid turning on the radio
- Shop early before stores play holiday music
- Listen to it, have a good cry, and allow yourself to feel sad

### Holiday Food:

- Prepare as usual
- Eat with the person with dementia at their residence
- Go out for dinner
- Invite friends over
- Change routine (e.g. go to a buffet)
- Ask for help

### Post-Holiday & New Year's Celebration:

- Spend as usual
- Remove decorations early
- Attend a New Year's party
- Host a New Year's party
- Spend time with only a few friends
- Write in a journal your hopes and dreams for the New Year
- Go to bed early

## Safety and Security during the Holidays

During the holidays, it is important not only to encourage people with dementia to participate in the festivities and engage in meaningful activities, but it is also crucial to consider their safety during this busy time of year. Whether you are caring for a person with dementia at home, or having them visit you for the holidays, consider some of the strategies below for ensuring that they can enjoy your time together in a safe environment.



- If you have an open fire, be sure to use a fitted fireguard.
- Buy unbreakable ornaments.
- Do not use ornaments or decorations which may appear to be edible.
- Remove trip hazards such as trailing cords or extension cables, clutter and area rugs.
- Lock away medicines and dangerous household chemicals.
- Avoid having poisonous plants or berries in the home (e.g. holly or mistletoe berries).
- Exercise caution with electrical appliances, decorative lights and candles.
- Be careful about knives and other sharp objects when preparing holiday meals.

Your home may become noisy and busy during a celebration, or over the entire festive season, making it easier for the person with dementia to leave unnoticed. If you are worried about the person with dementia leaving your home on their own and getting lost, talk to other members of your family and decide on a plan of action. For example:

- Keep doors leading onto busy roads closed or locked if needed.
- Enlist someone to accompany the person outdoors if they want to go for a walk.
- In the evening, ensure doors are locked and that no windows are left open.
- Do not store jackets, boots and other outdoor clothing items near exits as they may trigger the person with dementia to go outside. Store in a closet or another location instead.

*Adapted from: Festivals, Holidays and Celebrations, Alzheimer's Society of U.K. Information Sheet*

## Notes and Events

### DEMENTIA HELPLINE

Alzheimer Society  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

1-800-936-6033  
(Lower Mainland 604-681-8651)

Helping people with dementia, their friends, and their family members to build the confidence to maintain quality of life when facing dementia.



### Our Vision

Our ultimate vision is to create a world without Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

### Our Mission

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. exists to alleviate the personal and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, to promote public awareness and to search for the causes and the cures.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. relies on the generosity of individuals and the community to ensure families have access to the knowledge, skills and tools they need to live well with dementia. Your donation will help make the journey easier for families impacted by Alzheimer's disease or related dementias.

### Free Telephone Workshops



Thursday, December 16<sup>th</sup>  
12 noon

### Understanding Communication

This workshop for caregivers offers insights about effective communication strategies and ways of providing care that focus on the needs of the person with the disease.

To see a list of the upcoming workshops or to register, go to [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org) and click on **We Can Help**.

You can also register toll-free at 1-866-396-2433 (Mon-Fri, 6am to 2pm P.S.T.)

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