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Alzheimer's and the holidays

By *Carmy Jerome and Allissa Randazzo*

Guest Columnists

POSTED: 11/21/2016 08:01:30 PM MST

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease is sometimes challenging on an ordinary day — and caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease during the holidays can be challenging for both of you.

In order to make the holidays less stressful for everyone, consider these ideas when planning your holiday celebrations.

If your loved one lives with you, these ideas will help to make your holiday more enjoyable:

- Keep the holiday decorations tastefully small. Individuals with dementia take comfort in the sameness of their environment. Try to avoid overwhelming him/her with a makeover of blinking lights and rearranged furniture.
- Spend time together looking at old photos and reminiscing about holiday traditions from the past.
- Involve your loved one in holiday preparations. It is possible that he/she may no longer have the capacity to perform complex tasks, but ask him/her to assist you in simple tasks such as folding napkins, sorting ornaments, or wrapping gifts.
- Let friends and family members know what to expect when they come to visit. If someone hasn't seen your loved one in a few months, call or write in advance to explain the changes.
- Have a quiet place where your loved one can excuse him/herself to rest.

If your loved one lives in an assisted living or nursing home community keep these ideas in mind:

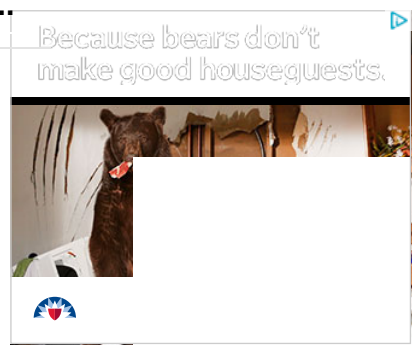
- Your loved one will surely appreciate visits from friends and family — just not all at the same time. Ask friends to stagger their visits during the holiday season and at a time of day that is best for your loved one. People with dementia often experience "sundowning," an acute increase in disorientation and irritability, usually occurring in the late afternoon/early evening. It is best to visit in the late morning or early afternoon.
 - If you invite him/her to come to your home during the holidays make sure that your home is safe for the person. Use candles, remove any throw rugs that could present trip hazards, and make sure that someone keeps track of times.
 - Be mindful that large groups can lead to anxiety and stress for someone with memory loss so have a quiet place where your loved one can excuse him/herself.
- Don't forget to take care of yourself:
- Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease is a full-time commitment and the stress of the holidays may make it even more challenging for both of you.

- Don't try to do everything this holiday season. Focus on one or two favorite family traditions.
- Simplify your schedule and plan to attend fewer parties.
- Participate in drawing names for gifts to minimize shopping trips.
- Use gift bags instead of spending time wrapping.
- Purchase store bought baked goods or snacks, no one has to know but you.
- Remember that you can't take care of someone else or enjoy the holidays if you are too worn out.

Above all, try to maintain normal daily routines as much as possible. Make sure that medications are given at the scheduled time; ensure that everyone gets plenty of rest and nourishment. Try to limit excess intake of sweets by not having all of those delicious baked goods within easy reach of your loved one.

Recognize and acknowledge that things are different but continue to take joy in your loved one and appreciate the time you do spend together this holiday season.

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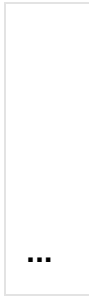
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