

Cultivating Joy and Resilience During the Holidays: Tips for Caregivers

Presented by



Joan Asseff, LCSW-S

Alzheimer's Texas

A privately funded voluntary health organization formed in 1982 to serve Central Texans with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers.

MISSION

To eliminate Alzheimer's disease and related disorders through the advancement of research and to enhance care and support for individuals, their families, and caregivers.

VISION

To create and sustain a dementia capable Texas in which persons with Alzheimer's and related disorders, and their families, receive quality care, effective treatments, and meaningful support.




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Learning Objectives

- Understand risk factors for increased depression, stress, and anxiety for caregivers during the holiday season.
- Learn strategies for cultivating resilience and joy for dementia caregivers and those living with dementia during the holiday season.
- Identify specific steps caregivers can take to practice proactive self care during the holidays.
- Think about and share ways we are supporting ourselves and//or caregivers to experience better mental health and well-being during the holiday season.





Depression, Anxiety, and Stress During the Holidays

- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or sad
- Fatigue
- Financial concerns
- Unrealistic expectations
- Losses/Grief
- Loneliness
- Time with family or being unable to be with family
- Changes in weather and decreased daylight

Dementia Specific Stressors

- Sense of loss because their loved one is not the same as during prior holidays
- Once loved activities might not make sense anymore
- Special traditions like decorating the house or having company over may become too bothersome or dangerous
- A person with dementia may feel a sense of loss during the holidays



Impact on Caregivers and People Living with Dementia

- *According to a 2017 AARP Survey, 7 in 10 family caregivers say it is emotionally stressful to care for loved ones during the holiday season.*
- *More than 6 million Americans are estimated to have late-life depression, and holidays can increase those feelings of sadness. A person with dementia may feel a sense of loss during the holidays—missing someone who passed away a long time ago, or maybe not recognizing the family around them and feeling that something is wrong.*

<https://www.dementiacarecentral.com/holidays/>





Cultivating Joy and Resilience

- Create a safe and calm space
- Adapt holiday activities
- Prepare holiday visitors
- Take care of yourself
- Trust your instincts

Create a Safe and Calm space



- **Tone down decorations:** Avoid blinking lights or large decorative displays that can cause confusion. Avoid decorations that cause clutter or require you to rearrange a familiar room.
- **Avoid safety hazards:** Substitute electric candles for burning candles. If you light candles, don't leave them unattended. Avoid fragile decorations or decorations that could be mistaken for edible treats. If you have a tree, secure it to a wall.
- **Play favorite music:** Familiar or favorite holiday music may be enjoyable. Adjust the volume to be relaxing and not distressing.
- **Limit the number of visitors at any one time:** Plan visits when the person usually is at their best.



Adapt Holiday Activities

- **Adjust holiday meals:** Making just a few favorite recipes and take less time for cleaning. Consider eating out or allowing others to cook and clean.
- **Limit the festivities:** Give yourself permission to cut back on your role and the number and location of holiday activities.
- **Avoid disruptions:** Plan a gathering at the best time of day for the person with dementia. Keep daily routines in place as much as possible.
- **Plan meaningful activities:** Read a favorite holiday story, look at photo albums, watch a favorite holiday movie or sing songs.
- **Keep outings brief:** If you'll be attending a holiday gathering, plan to be brief or be prepared to leave early if necessary. Make sure there is a place to rest or take a break.
- **Prepare together.** Mix batter, decorate cookies, open holiday cards or make simple decorations. Focus on the task rather than the outcome.
- **Start a new tradition:** It's hard to let go of a tradition when loved ones are gone or can't participate, so start a new one.



Prepare Holiday Visitors

- **Provide an update:** Let guests know ahead of time about any changes in behavior or memory since their last visit. Providing a recent photo can help people prepare for changes in appearance.
- **Offer communication tips:** Suggest ways for guests to listen patiently, such as not criticizing repeated comments, not correcting errors and not interrupting.
- **Suggest activities:** Tell guests ahead of time what activities you have planned or suggest something they might bring, such as a photo album.



Take Care of Yourself

- **Fill your tank first:** We can't either run on empty.
- **Invite holiday visitors:** Ask family or friends to come over to help lift your spirits and infuse energy.
- **Pick and choose:** Focus on the holiday activities and traditions that are most important to you. Remember that you can't do it all.
- **Manage others' expectations:** Set realistic expectations for what you can contribute to family holiday celebrations.
- **Delegate:** Let family and friends help with cleaning, addressing cards and shopping for gifts.
- **Make time for yourself:** Ask a family member or friend to give you a break so that you can enjoy a holiday outing without caregiving responsibilities.



Trust your Instincts

Set

Set your own limits and be clear about them with others. Caregivers do not have to live up to the expectations of friends or relatives.

Celebrate

Celebrate holidays in ways that are important to you. Include the person with dementia as much as possible.

Find

Find time for holiday activities you like to do. For example, go for a walk in the neighborhood and look at holiday decorations, or bake holiday cookies.



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Questions?

What do you want us to know?

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