



ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION

Aging & Long Term Care OF EASTERN WASHINGTON

Aging & Long Term Care of Eastern Washington

SUPPORTING THOSE WITH MEMORY LOSS DURING HOLIDAYS

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WWW.ALTCREW.ORG | ADVOCACY. ACTION. ANSWERS.

SERVING: Northern Ferry, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens & Whitman counties

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OBJECTIVES

- Preparing for a holiday
- Managing stress during a holiday
- Tips to help with behaviors
- Dealing with feelings after a holiday



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The hustle and bustle...



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.... Or the calm?



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HOLIDAYS CAN BE STRESSFUL FOR PLWD WHEN THEY:

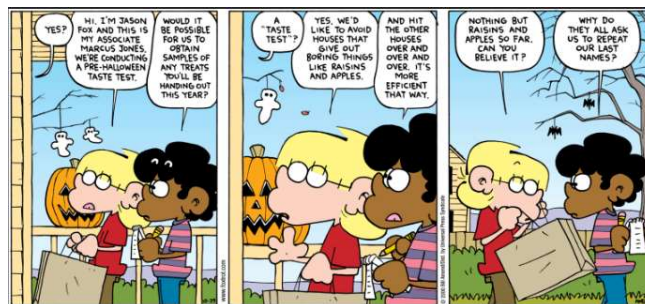
- Are in unfamiliar settings
- Are around unfamiliar people
- Travel
- Are around large groups of people
- Break their normal routines
- Attend events/gatherings at night
- Need to use unfamiliar technology
- Hear loud noise, music and conversations
- Are tired



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HOLIDAYS CAN BE STRESSFUL FOR CARE PARTNERS WHEN THEY:

- Are the lone caregiver
- Create unrealistic expectations
- Have financial stress
- Are part of the Family Triple Decker Sandwich (Work, kids, caregiving)
- Don't have enough time in the day
- Travel
- Have guilt, grief, and the Ghost of Christmas Past



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Have a conversation with friends/family members

- Call or meet face-to-face to discuss holiday celebrations
- Explain things like:
 - **Any changes they might expect to see** (for example, that the PLWD may not recognize everyone or may wear different clothes)
 - **How festivities might change** (for example, having smaller gatherings throughout the holiday rather than one large gathering)
 - **How to best communicate** (for example, give the PLWD plenty of time to respond and avoid “testing” them)
 - **Any difficult feelings** (for example, worry that the PLWD may find the holiday difficult)



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Have a conversation with friends/family members

- Call or meet face-to-face to discuss holiday celebrations
- Explain things like:
 - **What gifts may not work well for the PLWD** (for example, avoid car accessories if they recently stopped driving)
 - **How family members can help the primary care partner** (for example, how someone might give the PLWD a break to allow them to join festivities)
 - **What parents should tell children about the PLWD** (for example, that the PLWD may not recognize them, but this doesn't mean they don't love them!)



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Gift Ideas for the PLWD

- YOUR TIME! (visit, phone call)
- Comfortable, easy to remove clothing
- Videos of family members
- Photo albums
- Subscriptions to magazines
- Night lights
- Personal Bulletin board
- Scrapbook
- Music to listen to
- DVD's or download episodes of the person's favorite
- TV or radio show
- - Artwork from grandchildren



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Gift Ideas for the Care Partner

- YOUR TIME!
 - Offer to visit so they can take a break
 - Offer to run errands for them
 - Offer to pre-prepare meals
 - Offer to listen
 - Educate yourself about dementia so you can be a support to them
- A book or audio book on caregiving
- Offer to pay for in home care
- Gift cards for services like meal preparation, chore services, etc.



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Decide how to celebrate

- Determine the most comfortable way to celebrate. Options include:
 - Planning a video call to cook, watch a movie or bake together
 - Having family come over in shifts instead of all at once
 - Having people travel to the PLWD instead of having the PLWD travel
 - Celebrating earlier in the day, like with a brunch, instead of in the evening
 - Building new traditions if some feel too stressful



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Decorate (if you want!)

- Don't feel pressure to decorate as much as you have in the past
- Avoid using things that the PLWD could confuse with real food (like candies, gingerbread, artificial fruits/vegetables, etc.)
- Avoid blinking lights
- Keep any flames (fireplaces, candles, etc.) attended at all times
- Try to avoid clutter, especially in walkways



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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Decorate (if you want!)

- Avoid decorations that are animated or that have a human form since these could be frightening
- Secure any cords or wires so they are not tripping hazards
- Make sure that the front of the house and entryway are still recognizable
- Continue to provide bright lighting, especially in walkways

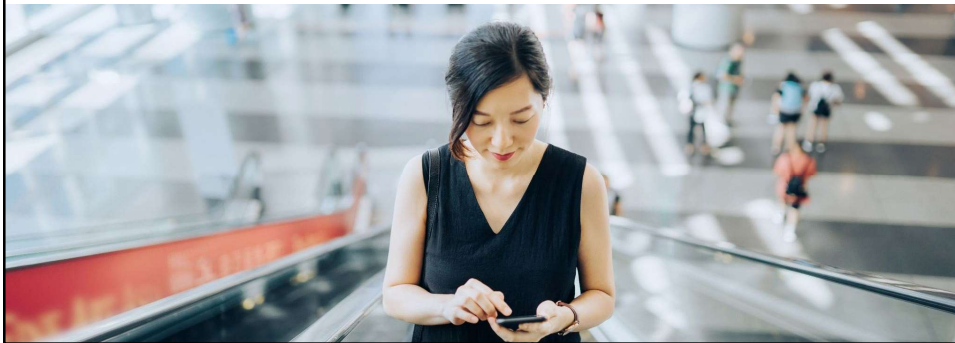


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BEFORE THE HOLIDAY

Prepare to travel - Flying

- Consider using cards from organizations like the [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower](#) program or the [Alzheimer's Association](#)
- Keep important documents like passports and IDs with the care partner
- Clearly label all bags with name, phone number and address
- Consider buying travel insurance or a flexible ticket since travel plans may need to be adjusted



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Before the Holiday

Prepare to travel

- Consider an identity bracelet, a card that has your phone number, or a phone background with important phone numbers
- Keep medication in an easily accessible bag
- Carry the phone numbers of your pharmacy and doctor(s)
- Pack reassuring objects, like a photograph or a comforting blanket
- On a road trip, plan and make several restroom/walking stops along the way



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DURING THE HOLIDAY

- Focus on the things that bring happiness and let go of activities that seem overwhelming or stressful
- Find a place that the PLWD can go if they are feeling overwhelmed, and list coping strategies for the PLWD and care partner
- Maintain routine as much as possible
- Involve the PLWD by asking if they want to:
 - Wrap gifts
 - Prepare food (as safety permits)
 - Help decorate
 - Play games
 - Decorate cookies



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DURING THE HOLIDAY

Care Partner Stress

- Don't be in denial
- Be realistic
- Delegate
- Prepare for emotion and discord
- Don't try to solve old family problems
- Continue/start healthy behaviors
- Seek support
- You won't please everyone
- Take breaks
- Give yourself grace



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DURING THE HOLIDAY

Preserving Holiday Traditions

- Modify baking so that participation is easier
- Reminisce about people on your holiday card list
- Read cards that you receive together
- Modify gift wrapping if needed
- Talk about your favorite holiday foods
- Sing holiday songs
- Take a drive around town to look at holiday lights (keeping a watchful eye for stress)
- Use the sights, sounds, and smells of the holidays to stimulate your loved one's senses
- Try to limit alcohol and rich foods



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SAFETY

- People with dementia tend to have problems with sensory input and judgement
- Increased activity may increase agitation, behaviors, and exit seeking
 - Dress the person in identifiable clothing
 - Give them a Safe Return Bracelet as an early present
 - Keep your driveways and walkways free of snow and ice
 - Don't place poisonous plants such as Poinsettias out for display
 - Secure electrical cords, scatter rugs, and other trip hazards
 - Move furniture and familiar items as little as possible to minimize changes to routine.



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IF BEHAVIORS HAPPEN...



Detect and connect

- Join the person in their reality
- Understand context: Who? What? When? Why? Where? How?
- Approach the person calmly and respectfully



Address physical needs first

- Look at medical issues, including pain
- Physical concerns? (Hunger, thirst)
- Environmental factors? (Temperature, lighting)



Then address emotional needs

- Focus on feelings, not facts
- Imagine how they feel
- Your knowledge is power!
- Reinforce you are there to help



Reassess and plan for next time

- Go back to Detect and connect
- What went well? What didn't?
- How can you adjust for next time?

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AFTER THE HOLIDAY

- It's normal for the PLWD to rally themselves for big events, then be more fatigued or confused afterward.
- It's normal for the care partner to have post-holiday stress. Encourage them to schedule time to care for themselves after the holiday, doing things like:
 - Resting
 - Going to a movie
 - Having lunch with a friend
 - Going for a walk
 - Scheduling doctor visits



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RESOURCES

Holidays

- [Holiday Hints for Alzheimer's Caregivers | National Institute on Aging \(nih.gov\)](https://www.nih.gov)
- [The Holidays and Alzheimer's | alz.org](https://www.alz.org)
- [News | Alzheimer's Association](https://www.alz.org)
- [Holidays | alz.org](https://www.alz.org)
- [Dementia and the Holidays - Memory and Brain Wellness Center \(washington.edu\)](https://www.washington.edu)
- [University of Colorado Newsletter](https://www.colorado.edu)



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RESOURCES

Self-Care

- [Be a Healthy Caregiver | Alzheimer's Association](#)
- <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/134-activities-to-add-to-your-self-care-plan/>

Traveling

- [Holidays and dementia – things to consider | Alzheimer's Society \(alzheimers.org.uk\)](#)
- [Preparing and packing for a holiday when someone has dementia | Alzheimer's Society \(alzheimers.org.uk\)](#)
- [Be a Healthy Caregiver | Alzheimer's Association](#)



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For more information and assistance:

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