

How to Handle Holiday Travel and Celebration Problems Common to People with Alzheimer's and Other Dementias

Holiday Trouble Spot #1: **Frenzy at Home**

- Preserve, as much as possible, the person's daily routine regarding times for meals, exercise, and activities.
- Don't think you have to make the holiday exactly as it always was. Emphasize a few favorite traditions and let go of the rest.
- Adapt longstanding traditions to the person's present abilities. If Mom always decorated the tree, help her attach ornaments rather than completely taking the job over. If Dad carved the turkey, let him sit in his customary seat but bring the bird to the table already sliced, and let him help fill plates.
- Keep the person's hands busy while you handle holiday chores. Some ideas: decorating sugar cookies, kneading dough, stirring a pot, sorting through a box of unbreakable ornaments, stringing popcorn or cranberries, looking at Christmas cards.
- Safety-proof: Avoid candles (fire hazard), artificial fruit (a choking hazard if mistaken for real), gingerbread houses (if made of inedible items), blinking lights (disorienting), garlands that obscure railings on stairs.
- Take advantage of the powerful sensory memories of this time of year. Whether it's playing in the background or sung in the form of carols or hymns, holiday music taps into deep emotional memories and usually brings a great deal of pleasure to someone with dementia. Expose the person to familiar holiday smells, such as clove-studded oranges, evergreens, cinnamon, and peppermint.
- Reminisce by bringing out photo albums or telling old family stories. But don't make it feel like a quiz by asking, "Do you remember...?" Just start the story.

Holiday Trouble Spot #2: **Parties**

- Invite small groups to visit the person at home. A few friends at a time may be more manageable, than one large party.
- If you're hosting, keep the gathering small. Make it a brunch or luncheon if sundown syndrome is a risk.

- If you're a caregiver invited to a party, consider having someone stay at home with the person who has dementia rather than bringing her with you. You both may enjoy this arrangement better.
- Designate someone to stay at the person's side throughout an event to provide a continuous, calming presence and to prevent wandering. Noise and new faces can overwhelm.
- Introduce those who approach the person with dementia, no matter how close a friend or relative they may be: "And here's your niece, Susan!" Don't draw attention to the fact that they were introduced just ten minutes earlier.
- Invite the person with Alzheimer's or dementia to join activities such as opening gifts or watching a sports game -- but don't insist that he participate.
- Withdraw as needed to a quiet corner or room where the person can feel relaxed and safe, away from loud kids or a cocktail-party crowd. Walk outside, weather permitting.
- Monitor the person's intake of alcohol, as he may not be able to remember and track it himself.
- Watch for cues that the person has had enough: increased impatience or fretfulness, pulling at clothes, withdrawal. Don't wait until he's overtired.

Holiday Trouble Spot #3: Flying

- Realize that even someone with early dementia shouldn't travel alone.
- Stay together in the airport at all times.
- Remain calm and don't rush the person in security lines. Some airports offer family-friendly lanes, they're not just for people traveling with children.
- Schedule flights early in the day, when the person may be in the best spirits and you're less likely to be marooned overnight in case of bad weather or other delays. It's worth the extra price to fly nonstop. Allow plenty of time for connections.
- Don't place medication in checked bags. Your carry-on should also contain everything the person would need if luggage is lost or a flight is delayed overnight: pajamas, toiletry items, change of clothing, medical contact information, and legal papers.
- Pack snacks and provide water, since dehydration is a risk for seniors. Use the bathroom just before the flight to help avoid the need for the person to do so on the airplane.
- Bring something for the person to do with his hands: a puzzle book, a photo album, knitting, a textured rubbery ball to hold, playing cards.
- Carry a blanket and small pillow for comfort's sake, as they may not be available on the flight.

Holiday Trouble Spot #4: Car Trips

- It's ideal to skip a long journey by car, but when a car trip is necessary, avoid traveling on peak days.
- Stop often, but stay with the person at gas stations and restaurants. New places invite confusion.
- Play the person's favorite music in the car, or find a radio station playing holiday classics.
- If you must stay in a hotel, remain with the person at all times. Get one large room with two beds rather than separate or adjoining rooms.

Holiday Trouble Spot #5: Shopping

- Avoid shopping just for tradition's sake. A drive to look at holiday lights is less likely to confuse and upset than a visit to a crowded shopping mall.
- If you shop, do so early in the day when it's less crowded.
- Visit one store, not a whole mall-full at once. Another reason to avoid malls: The vast parking lots can be disorienting.
- If you plan on making lots of purchases, it's easy to become distracted, so consider bringing a third person along who can stay with and focus on the person who has dementia.

About: Approved In Home Care

Approved In Home Care strives to improve the quality of life for seniors and their families. We provide customized care, that is affordable, dependable, with an experienced staff specializing in senior home assistance and care. We customize our services to fit your loved ones needs. We care for seniors who are healthy and independent OR those that suffer from illness such as: Parkinson's, Dementia and Alzheimer's.

Reprint or share this article:

<http://approvedhomecaredallas.com/wp-content/uploads/Holiday-Alzheimer-Tips.pdf>