

Forget-me-not this festive season

The holidays are a time when family and friends come together and share memories, laughs and good cheer. However, for families living with Alzheimer's, the holidays can also be a difficult time.



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"Caregiving responsibilities layered on top of keeping up with holiday traditions can take its toll on Alzheimer families, especially the caregiver," says Madré Fraenkel, occupational therapist specialising in therapy for persons living with Alzheimer's. She is also MD at Livewell Suits, South Africa's freestanding facility for Alzheimer's and dementia sufferers. "The person with Alzheimer's may also feel a sense of loss especially during the holidays."

With some planning and adjusted expectations, your celebrations can be filled with joy and magical moments to cherish forever.

Adjust your expectations, no one, including yourself, should expect you to maintain every holiday tradition or event.

- Give yourself permission to do only what you can reasonably manage
- Choose holiday activities that are most important to you
- Host a small family dinner instead of a big holiday party
- Consider serving a catered or takeout holiday meal.
- Start a new tradition. Have a potluck dinner where family or friends each bring a dish.
- Involve the person in the festivities

There may be manageable activities you can do together:

- Wrap gifts
- Bake favourite holiday recipes together. The person can stir batter or decorate cookies.
- Set the table. Avoid candles and artificial fruits and berries that could be mistaken for edible snacks.
- Talk about events to include in a holiday letter
- Prepare simple foods such as appetizers
- Read cards you receive together
- Look through photo albums or scrapbooks. Reminisce about people and past events.
- Watch a favourite holiday movie
- Sing favourite carols or read biblical passages

When the person lives in a care facility

A holiday is still a holiday whether celebrated at home or at a care facility. Here are some ways to celebrate together:

- Consider joining your loved one in any facility-planned activities
- Bring a favourite holiday food to share
- Sing holiday songs. Ask if other residents can join in.
- Read a favourite holiday story or poem out loud.

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