

Holidays and Celebrations

Why Can Holidays be Difficult?

Holidays bring changes to daily routines, large gatherings, noise, and travel. All of which can be overwhelming for a person living with dementia. They may have trouble following conversations, understanding what's happening, or remembering where they are. This can cause stress, confusion, or fatigue. What feels festive to others may feel overwhelming for them.

How Can You Prepare?

- Plan ahead where and how celebrations will take place.
- Decide if home visits, hosting at the person's residence, or smaller gatherings are best.
- Limit the number of visitors at one time. Consider shorter visits or staggered family groups.
- Choose the time of day when the person is usually most comfortable.
- Talk with family in advance so everyone understands the plan and expectations.

What should You Focus On?

- Adapt traditions to meet the person where they are – for example, bring a favourite holiday meal or music to them if attending a large event is too difficult.
- Reminiscing about past holidays can spark joy and meaningful conversation, even if short-term memory is impaired.
- Accept that the person may not remember the event afterwards – focus on the positive feelings and comfort they experienced in the moment.

Resources:

[Alzheimer Society of Canada -Holidays and Special Occasions](#)

What Can Help During the Event?

- Create a supportive environment: reduce background noise, turn down music, and keep lighting calm.
- Ensure accessibility: make sure washrooms are nearby and mobility needs (ramps, seating) are addressed.
- Keep routines in mind: serve meals at familiar times and avoid rushing.
- Simplify activities: focus on one or two meaningful traditions rather than a busy schedule.
- Encourage participation: offer simple roles, like folding napkins, stirring batter, or placing decorations.
- Offer breaks: ensure there is a quiet room available where your loved one can decompress and have a moment to themselves.
- Be flexible: if fatigue, restlessness, or confusion arises, adjust plans or end the visit early.

Meaningful Engagement

Celebrations don't need to be busy to be meaningful. Simple, engaging activities can help the person feel included and connected:

- Looking through photo albums or family holiday pictures.
- Listening to favourite holiday music or singing carols together.
- Baking simple holiday treats or helping stir batter.
- Decorating with ornaments, table settings, or small crafts.
- Reading a holiday story, poem, or prayer aloud together.
- Watching a familiar holiday movie or TV special.
- Sharing a quiet walk to enjoy lights or decorations.

