

# HOLIDAY TIPS



The holiday season can be a joyful time for family and friends to spend together and share in traditions. However, this busy time of year can also be particularly overwhelming and stressful for people affected by dementia.

With some adjustments, people living with dementia and their families can enjoy the holidays by participating in the traditions that have always been important to them, while creating new experiences.

The tips in this handout can help people living with dementia and their care partners make the holiday season special and meaningful.

For additional dementia information and support during the holidays, contact your [local Resource Centre](#), call the [First Link® Dementia Helpline](#) at 1-800- 936-6033 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) or visit [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org).

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# HOLIDAY TIPS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

The holidays are often filled with festive activities and special get-togethers with family and friends. However, if you are living with dementia, noise, large groups of people and the hectic pace of the holidays may increase anxiety.

To help make the season enjoyable, consider keeping things simple and focus on cherishing the time spent with the people closest to you.

Read on for a few additional suggestions that might help minimize holiday-related stress.

- Keep to your normal routine as much as possible.

- Recognize that you may not have as much stamina for large gatherings or activities as you had before and that's okay!
- Schedule time to re-energize.
- Try not to plan too many activities in one day.
- Think about the traditions that are most important to you and focus on those.

*Adapted from Celebrating the holidays with persons with dementia, caregivers and family and friends. Alzheimer Society of Peterborough, Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland & Haliburton.*

## PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

We asked people living with dementia from around the province to share their thoughts on the holiday season.

### WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS?

- "Looking at the store windows and window shopping."
- "Food!"
- "Presents."
- "Family – everyone is on holiday at the same time."
- "Singing – participating in the choir and watching the choir."
- "Decorations, especially the Christmas tree."
- "The Christmas light tours."

### WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO IN THE COMING NEW YEAR?

- "Seeing the seasons happening over again."

- "Spending time with family and friends."
- "Spring – nice temperature and things coming to life."
- "Seeing great-grandchildren starting to walk."



Thank you to Mario – a member of the B.C. Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia – for sharing this photo.

# HOLIDAY CHECKLIST

This holiday checklist is a tool that may be helpful for families affected by dementia. Whether you are living with dementia or you are a care partner, you may want to consider whether this is a good time to make some changes to support your health and well-being during the holidays. Underline what you would traditionally do and then circle what you want to do this year. Share this checklist with your family and have them do one of their own and compare notes.

## CARDS

- Mail as usual
- Shorten your list
- Choose to skip this year
- Use email to send cards

## DECORATIONS

- Decorate as usual
- Eliminate some or all decorations
- Ask for help
- Let others do it
- Make changes, such as putting up an artificial tree instead of a real one
- Have a special decoration for the person living with dementia

## HOLIDAY MUSIC

- Enjoy as usual
- Avoid turning on the radio
- Shop early before stores play holiday music

## MEALS

- Prepare as usual
- Ask for help
- Cook or bake but modify what you usually do
- Eat with the person living with dementia at their residence
- Go out for dinner
- Invite friends over
- Change routine (for example, go to a buffet)

## TRADITIONS

- Keep the old traditions
- Attend holiday parties
- Don't attend holiday parties
- Attend religious services
- Don't attend religious services
- Attend religious services at a different time
- Visit your family member living with dementia at their new residence
- Spend quiet time alone

## SHOPPING

- Shop as usual
- Shop early
- Make a shopping list before you go out
- Give cash or make a donation to an organization in the person's name
- Give baked goods
- Ask for help shopping or wrapping gifts
- Don't exchange gifts now but perhaps later

## POST-HOLIDAY & NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATION

- Spend as usual
- Attend a New Year's party
- Host a New Year's party
- Spend time with only a few friends
- Go to bed early
- Remove decorations early



# HOLIDAY TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

If you are a caregiver, pacing yourself and setting aside some quiet time during the holidays is important for your well-being and that of the person you are caring for. The following suggestions could be helpful as you plan for the holidays:

- Think about hiring help or asking family members and friends to help. Perhaps they can bring food, do some shopping or come early to set up. Practice accepting help if it's offered to you!
- Choose the occasions and traditions that are most important to you and your family and least disruptive for the person living with dementia.
- If visitors will be staying with you, try to anticipate what they will need to know – for example, not to leave the front door open if your family member is at risk of getting lost.
- If you are visiting an unfamiliar home, try to anticipate what you will need – for example, a sign on the bathroom door.
- Consider different ways to involve the person living with dementia in holiday preparation and planning. For example, involve them in planning dinner or choosing who to invite. If he or she can no longer bake, perhaps they can stir batter or add ingredients. Try to focus on the person's interests, skills and abilities.
- Even in the flurry of holiday activity, try to stick to the person's routine as much as possible. For example, keep meal times and bed times the same. This can help calm and orient him or her in the midst of all the changes.



- Consider having smaller gatherings and allowing more time between visits.
- Take time to recognize the good work you do and how much you mean to the person you are caring for. Consider treating yourself.
- If people ask you what you would like, don't be afraid to offer some gift ideas for yourself; you deserve it! Some suggestions could be: gift certificates for restaurants, a homemade coupon for a free afternoon or day off, tickets to a movie or a gift certificate for a spa service of your choice.

If you would like additional tips for celebrating the holiday season or if you need to talk to someone who understands how you are feeling, contact your [local Resource Centre](#), call the [First Link® Dementia Helpline](#) at 1-800-936-6033 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) or visit [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org).

# HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

Choosing a gift for someone living with dementia may seem like an additional challenge during the holiday season. Fortunately, simple, useful and practical gifts are best. Like other traditions, try to adapt gift-giving to make the season less hectic and a little more relaxing.

Here are a few other gift-giving tips:

- Keep the person's personal preferences in mind.
- Consider personal safety – don't give gifts that might pose a safety risk.
- Consider the symptoms that the person is experiencing. Think twice before giving gifts they might find confusing or frustrating – such as a difficult puzzle, electronics or tools.
- Prepare a list of gift ideas to share with family and friends.

Below are some gift ideas you may find helpful if you choose to make a holiday gift list.

**Early stage:** People experiencing the early stages of dementia may only have mild impairments, retain many of their abilities and require minimal assistance.

Gifts that can encourage and enhance a person's independence and abilities may include:

- Familiar games that stimulate, but do not depend on short-term memory alone. For example, dominoes or playing cards.
- A gift certificate for a meal at his or her favourite restaurant.
- A photo album or scrapbook that displays the person's life visually.
- A diary or notebook.



- A recording of the person's favourite music. For example, you could make a mixed CD of music they enjoy to aid reminiscence.
- Home videos are a great creative gift. You could include both old and current videos, or combine several into a highlights video.
- Jewelry such as an ID bracelet through the Society's MedicAlert® Safely Home® program.
- A subscription to a genealogy website.
- Tickets to a sporting event, play or concert.
- Regular visits to talk, play a game or just be together.

**Middle stage:** People in the middle stages of the disease will likely require more help with daily activities as their cognitive and physical abilities change.

Consider choosing gifts that focus on the person's remaining abilities, for example:

- Materials to sort, such as cards, keys or beads. Sorting is an activity that stimulates the sense of touch and is an activity that people with dementia tend to enjoy as the disease progresses.
- Comfortable and easy to manage clothing.
- A CD or recording of the person's favourite music.
- Video or picture book of the person's favourite interests – for example, movie stars, historical events or nature.
- A short day trip together to a familiar and favourite place.
- Night lights.
- Larger piece puzzles (adult appropriate).
- A donation to the person's charity of choice.

**Late stage:** People in the later stages of the disease may experience the world primarily through their five senses to maintain connection. Gifts that can help stimulate these senses include:

- Hand or body lotions in a favourite scent.

- A bird feeder set up near the person's favourite window.
- Snow globe or music box.
- Lap blanket to keep warm.
- A soft, cuddly object or a fluffy bathrobe in his or her favourite colour.
- A CD or recording of the person's favourite music or peaceful sounds of nature.
- A visit from a well-behaved pet.



Adapted from [www.egyptianaaa.org](http://www.egyptianaaa.org); Alzheimer's Association California Southland Chapter [www.alz.org/so-cal/](http://www.alz.org/so-cal/). Previously featured in *In Touch* Special Holiday Edition 2012.

## LEARN FROM HOME: CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS TELE-WORKSHOP

Join facilitator Jan Robson (pictured right), as she looks at ways of including the person living with dementia in preparing for the holidays and in the celebrations. This previously recorded workshop also presents strategies for minimizing stress for both the person with dementia and the caregiver.

To view the recording visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrnBoh9wV00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrnBoh9wV00).

To learn more about the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s dementia education tele-workshops visit: [alzbc.org/tele-workshops](http://alzbc.org/tele-workshops).





# HOLIDAY MEAL TIME TIPS

For many families, meals play a large part in how holidays are celebrated. If the person living with dementia is experiencing difficulty with eating, you may anticipate a holiday meal to be especially challenging.

However, by planning ahead and making adjustments, it is possible to ensure everyone around your table has a positive experience.

Here are some tips for supporting a person living with dementia during holiday meals:

- Avoid having too many different patterns and decorations on the table. Consider using a plain tablecloth with plates and napkins that are in solid, contrasting colours.
- If eating with a knife and fork has become a challenge, try preparing finger foods or foods which only require one utensil, like soups or mashed vegetables. Try not to worry about manners and formality, as this may just put unnecessary pressure on everyone.
- If someone else is preparing the holiday meal, try to let them know of any preferences or favourite foods that the person living with dementia may have. This can help make the meal more enjoyable.
- Although many people eat a lot on special occasions, a very full plate can be overwhelming for someone who has difficulty with eating and/or making choices. Think about the size of the meal you serve and consider portioning out some or all of the food before sitting at the table.
- If you have a large number of guests, the person living with dementia may be more comfortable eating one-on-one or in a separate room with a smaller group of people.
- Drinking alcohol in moderation may be fine for some people; however, keep in mind that alcohol can increase confusion and risk of falls. Consider serving non-alcoholic wine or beer, or a special non-alcoholic cocktail to maintain that tradition.
- Encourage others to learn about dementia in advance. To find out more about what information and resources are available contact your [local Resource Centre](#), the [First Link® Dementia Helpline](#) at 1-800- 936-6033 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) or visit [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org).

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## NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

The First Link® Dementia Helpline is a confidential, province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia, including people living with dementia, their caregivers, friends, family, health-care providers and the general public.

- Phone [604-681-8651](tel:604-681-8651); [1-800-936-6033](tel:1-800-936-6033) (toll-free)  
Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Email [supportline@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:supportline@alzheimerbc.org)

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