

## Twelve Tips for Happy Holidays

### Suggestions for family members, caregivers and people living with dementia

The holidays can be a stressful time of year for people living with dementia, their family members and/or caregivers. Here are a few refreshing tips to help set you up for success this holiday season.

1. **Keep “relaxation” in the holiday schedule:** We tend to over-commit ourselves for fear of disappointing people and we can feel guilty about turning down invitations. Be patient with yourself and don't overdo it. Think about how much you can manage without being overwhelmed and be honest with others. You can also make plans to get together in the New Year instead. Most people will understand. They might also be feeling pressured.
2. **Invite family and friends over:** Keep the entertaining at home so you can minimize your travel. If the thought of cleaning and cooking is overwhelming, plan a night out where you can leave the cooking to someone else (or consider catering options). Many of the local supermarkets have delicious meals and appetizers ready to take home.
3. **Plan your social gatherings in smaller groups:** A person living with dementia might feel overwhelmed in large groups with too many conversations and too much noise. You can also aim for getting together at a time of day when you often feel your best. Try having a backup plan in case the person with dementia experiences a responsive behaviour (E.g., gets upset or is overwhelmed). It will help you know what to do in an instant.
4. **Activate your social life:** Get out and interact with others and try not to isolate yourself. Social activity is good stimulation for your brain.
5. **Have open conversations with people:** The holidays are about connecting with the ones you love, and the ones who love you. Try and be open about what is going on in your life. Sometimes we tend to skirt the issues and stick to the small talk. This can be a good time to be honest about your day-to-day challenges so family and friends have a better idea and the opportunity to support you. It is also a great time to ask for support where you need it most.
6. **Be conscious of how you're feeling:** If you're beginning to get overwhelmed or you want to steer clear of sensitive topics, allow yourself to take a moment and regroup in another room - away from the commotion. It's important for care partners and people living with dementia to keep calm and avoid undue stress.
7. **Mind your stress levels:** Healthy body, healthy brain! When you're stressed you won't be functioning as well as you could be, regardless of whether you're a care partner or a person living with dementia - and stress can be harmful to your physical and mental health.
8. **Reconsider the traditional holiday shopping:** You may want to avoid the mayhem of the malls and the backlog of holiday traffic. Be creative, look for alternative ways to give gifts and stick to a manageable budget. Try shopping online. You can also send money

or ask friends or relatives to pick things up while they're out. Arrange within the group to play secret Santa and focus on buying for one person. Make your own gifts at home. And if none of the options sound interesting, you can always re-gift some items you may have tucked away in storage.

9. **Support yourself when cooking for the holidays:** Take the easy way out. Make cooking dinner a fun, calm, collaborative event where others can contribute. Potlucks are very popular.
10. **Exercise:** We hate to sound repetitive, but we can't emphasize enough...healthy body = healthy brain. Exercise increases your endorphins, reduces your risk of diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure and cholesterol. It's also excellent for your cardiovascular system and can help reduce your risk for things like vascular dementia. It also allows more oxygen to get to the brain, paving the way for better brain function and helps relieve stress.
11. **Add your favorite physical activity to your wish list** for the holidays – try snow shoeing, ice skating, skiing or a brisk walk in the park. It will help keep stress at bay and burn off calories.
12. **Last but not least - enjoy the holidays with your loved ones:** Live in the moment. Aim to create moments of joy instead of entire evenings or full days Take photos and videos and capture those memories you'll want to cherish into the future!

For additional questions please contact the support team at the Alzheimer Society of Calgary:

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