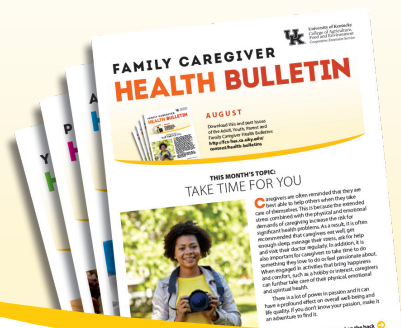




University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



DECEMBER 2021

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

BALANCING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND THE HOLIDAYS



The holiday season is often a meaningful time of year complete with traditions, memories, and a sense of belonging. However, such celebration can also create added confusion or anxiety for someone experiencing memory loss. In an effort to make the holidays easier for caregivers and those living with Alzheimer's disease, the Mayo Clinic and the National Institute on Aging provide a variety of holiday tips for Alzheimer's caregivers:

- **Celebrate safely with Covid-19.** People with underlying chronic conditions and those who have trouble following personal protective measures, like wearing a mask or physical distancing, are at increased risk for illness. Some long-term care facilities may

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Disabilities
accommodated
with prior notification.

Take care of yourself. Ask for help and give yourself at least 10 minutes a day without any responsibility.

➔ Continued from page 1

continue to have visitation guidelines depending on vaccination rates and Covid-19 cases. If restricted from face-to-face visits because of health and safety, connect virtually or by telephone.

- **Prepare your guests and family members.**

If people have not been around the person with memory loss or do not know about Alzheimer's disease, provide examples of typical behavior so people know what to expect. Remind people that the memory loss and related behavior — like forgetting words, names, and faces, wandering, or poor judgment is not intentional, but a result of the disease. Tell people that their presence and the joy in the moment is experienced and appreciated. That feeling is more important than what the person with dementia can remember. Provide tips on how best to listen and communicate with the person with dementia, and suggest a list of activities they can do together.

- **Prepare the person with Alzheimer's disease.**

In some cases, showing photos of guests and having phone calls with people in advance can provide some familiarity. Cooking or baking, opening or writing holiday cards, or decorating together are also good reminders about what is coming. Focus on the task rather than the outcomes. Involving the person with Alzheimer's disease, even if it is just through observation, can provide a sense of pleasure and purpose. In addition, the potential anticipation and opportunity to reminisce can be fun.

- **Maintain daily routines.** Some times of the day are better for people with dementia than other times. Try to keep the person's routine as close to normal as possible. Find time and space for quiet and rest, especially if there is to be a lot of noise or chaos.

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- **Adapt holiday decor.** Tone down decorations that might be confusing, cause clutter, or rearrange familiar rooms. Avoid bright lights and lights that blink. Avoid unattended burning candles and fragile decorations that may be mistaken for real food or candy.

- **Plan a meaningful activity and simplify traditions.** Reminisce through old stories, photo albums, and movies. Play familiar music at a soothing volume. Instead of a big meal, consider a smaller dinner with close friends or family.

- **Plan a small gathering.** People with Alzheimer's disease tend to do better with smaller gatherings and quiet, relaxed settings. Remind guests that one-on-one visits are meaningful. Keep outings brief.

- **Take care of yourself.** You cannot do it all. Decide what is most important and meaningful to you and to the person with memory loss and choose that. Ask for help. Delegate task lists when it comes to cleaning, cooking, writing on

cards, shopping, decorating, etc. Take a break from the holiday and from caregiving. Give yourself at least 10 minutes a day without any responsibility.

- **Set limits and realistic expectations.** As a caregiver, you know what is best given the circumstance. Set limits, and do not fall to the pressure of living up to the expectations of others.

REFERENCES

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**FAMILY CAREGIVER
HEALTH BULLETIN**

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