

Caring at Christmas

Christmas can be a wonderful time for family and friends. At the best of times it can also be overwhelming. When caring for a loved one with dementia, it can easily feel all too much. However, with some planning and some adjustments, this holiday can be enjoyable for everyone.



Alzheimer National Helpline

1800 341 341

When making plans ahead of Christmas this year you should assess current COVID-19 levels to determine what you can do in line with current public health advice from the Government.

Top tips for Caring at Christmas

- Have realistic expectations, things may need to be different but still enjoyable for everyone
- Talk to the person with dementia about what they think about Christmas and how they would like to be involved. Consider their past attitude to Christmas
- Think about what you feel is possible and what you would like to do this year
- Talk to family and friends in advance about what you both feel is needed to make the day work for everyone
- Remember, family and friends often have some spare time over the holidays, talk to them about ways they could help or spend time with you
- If wider family members can't be as physically present as other years ask how they might otherwise support practically i.e. food shopping drop to the door, pharmacy run to ensure have necessary medication stock
- Baking, Christmas arts and crafts such as creating a table setting, or decorating a tree can be a lovely way to spend time together. Be mindful that lots of decorations or flashing lights might be overwhelming
- Think about usual or past religious attitudes. Would your loved one enjoy listening to carols or would they like to go to mass?
- A series of small events may work better than one large event
- Try to stagger visitors and visiting
- If there are lots of visitors, your loved one may appreciate someone staying beside them to help prompt with names and support conversation
- Some local groups or events may be cancelled during this time but many have adapted to connecting online. If you haven't heard from them, it may be worth phoning or checking their websites about any virtual events taking place
- Communicate care needs clearly with relevant agencies for the festive period
- If it is not possible to have the normal amount of visitors, or visit others in the usual way you would before Covid 19 try to stay connected with family and friends in any way you can – by phone or video-call. Ask family or friends to give you any necessary guidance and support around how to use technologies that may help your loved one to still feel connected
- If the house is going to be busy, identify a quiet space that the person with dementia can retreat to if they are feeling tired or overwhelmed
- Leave visual prompts near sinks to remind everyone to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds
- If it is possible, have your family gathering in a familiar place. If this is not possible, consider putting labels or pictures on doors – for example kitchen and bathroom

Reach out to friends and family for extra support at this time of year. Christmas can be hard with everyone (services) on holidays so it's important you have help then.



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- On Christmas day involve the person with dementia in the preparations, for example setting the table, preparing vegetables or a festive activity such as singing carols
- Have some photo albums or a memory box to hand, all generations can enjoy reminiscing
- Enjoy your meals and treats but don't overload the plates and avoid too much alcohol
- A walk or breath of fresh air in the garden can be a great idea for everyone
- Have a list of contact details clearly labeled and keep them visible. This should include family, friends, neighbours, your GP and pharmacy, Alzheimer Society of Ireland's National Helpline and any emergency numbers

Watch out that drinks and food-stuffs lying around are not being over-consumed by your loved one with dementia.

Christmas can be emotional, for everyone

- Allow for times of rest for you and for your loved one
- Build in time to do things you enjoy and make you smile
- Focus on what is going well
- Laugh
- Congratulate yourself for coping and for being there for someone who needs you

Try to enjoy the many opportunities presented at Christmas, to listen to favourite carols, watch seasonal movies, chat about previous Christmas experiences - if possible take your loved one to some of the shows which both they and you can enjoy.

If your loved one lives in a nursing home

- Talk to staff about Christmas plans in the home and what they feel your loved one will enjoy
- It is your presence that counts, celebrations can be simple
- Reminiscence about past holidays and events can trigger happy memories. Try and encourage conversation about how the person would have spent Christmas as a child, their own mother's cooking etc.
- Singing or listening to music can be a lovely way to spend time together
- Bring favourite book, photographs or music to enjoy together
- An Post will ensure free delivery of all card and letter mail posted to and from residents of Nursing and Care homes in Ireland until January 31st 2021. By writing FREEPOST where the stamp would normally be affixed, An Post will carry cards, letters large envelopes and packets weighing up to 2KG without a postage stamp
- Hand massage, brushing hair or aromatherapy can all be enjoyable for a person with advanced dementia
- If your loved one is tired or seems overwhelmed, don't prolong your visit

For information about late stage dementia and activities for people with advanced dementia you can contact our free and confidential Helpline.

For more information

Contact Alzheimer National Helpline

Helpline: 1800 341 341

Email: helpline@alzheimer.ie

Website Live chat: www.alzheimer.ie

Monday to Friday 10 am to 5 pm

Saturday 10 am to 4pm.

Factsheet:

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