

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND THE HOLIDAYS

Ruth Force, MS, LSW, Angel Corps
Greater Indiana Chapter, Regional Advisory Board

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's can be stressful any given day of the week however around the Holiday's that stress level seems to increase by leaps and bounds. As a caregiver you are responsible for your loved one's personal well being, including but not limited to, dressing, bathing, laundry, meals, and medications. It is the daily tasks and the inability to remember how to do these tasks that increase the frustration in an individual with Alzheimer's. Around the Holiday's your loved one can become more confused and anxious due to the hustle and bustle of family gatherings, shopping and baking. Individuals with Alzheimer's disease tend to have increased anxiety in crowds especially when there is an increase in the noise level surrounding them. As a caregiver their anxiety causes an increase in your anxiety as well. Caregivers can not be effective while in a heightened state of anxiety. Moreover, your loved one will sense your stress making caregiving a vicious circle. In order to lessen the Holiday stress you must minimize the external factors and listen closer to your loved one. Here are some tips to help.

- Allow them to assist with decorating the home as long as it is safe to do so. You may find that behind each Christmas ornament is a wonderful story!
- Baking has you stressed? Allow your loved one to assist by using an old recipe that they are familiar with and allow them to measure the ingredients while you mix and handle the oven.
- If Christmas shopping is what you want to do but can not take your loved one with you, look into community resources like adult day care or in-home respite care.
- Learn to recognize the symptoms of anxiety in your loved one. Arrange to gather with small groups of family instead of large ones and for shorter periods.
- If you are going to have family over don't be afraid to ask for help with the food preparation and planning.

Both caregivers and those they are caring for need time away from each other. Caregivers tend to focus all their energy, emotional and physical, towards their loved one. Do not feel guilty for wanting and taking some personal time to restore yourself. Your health is vital to your caregiving and you will be giving the best gift to your loved one by being good to yourself.

For more help the Alzheimer's Association provides a 24/7 Helpline at 1-800-272-3900.