



Holiday Hosting Tips: Preparing for a guest with Alzheimer's *What you need to know for a safe and festive season*

LOS ANGELES, CA (December 20, 2017) - The holidays bring extended families and friends together for love, fellowship and compassion under one roof. As you open your home this season, you may be hosting a relative or friend with early to mid-stage Alzheimer's disease, or a related dementia. Although hosting a guest with memory impairment may require some advance preparation, a few precautions will reduce stress and ensure a wonderful shared holiday experience. Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles (ALZGLA) suggests some tips for hosting 'Uncle Joe'; a guest with Alzheimer's disease.

Brief your guests – Discuss privately, in advance, that “Uncle Joe” has Alzheimer's and is experiencing memory and cognitive issues. Explain why guests may not be remembered. Suggest that guests avoid persistent or complex questions that may be confusing to Joe.

Consider the Caregiver – The holidays are filled with preparations that may be overwhelming for caregivers. The best gift you may give to a primary caregiver is respite. If possible, create a schedule ahead of time that allows several family members, or close friends, to spend time with “Uncle Joe” during your gathering. The primary caregiver will be able to relax and engage as a guest, and still be present to assist with any special need.

Wandering – A house full of loved ones is a holiday joy, but it also means that doors are constantly opening and closing. People with Alzheimer's can easily become disoriented and wander away from a new environment. If possible, have only one unlocked door for guests to enter and exit. Hang a bunch of festive jingle bells on the door, so you are aware when it opens and closes. In larger gatherings, appoint a “door monitor” – ostensibly to keep the winter chill out, but also to keep “Uncle Joe” company if he steps outside.

Holiday Memories – Holiday traditions; foods, songs, decorations, rituals – can be powerful memory aids, particularly for those with early to mid-stage Alzheimer's. Although “Uncle Joe” will struggle with some topics, you may find that he remembers people and events from holidays past. Family photo albums, a family china pattern, or a holiday blessing, are a good way to prompt memories and conversation.

Holiday Food & Drink – The range and amounts of holiday party foods can be overwhelming to a person with Alzheimer's. Some may struggle to use utensils. Consider preparing a separate plate for “Uncle Joe” with foods that have been pre-cut and diced into small bites. Be aware of potential choking hazards such as nuts, olives, or toothpicks. Alcohol can interact with any medications and the effects may add to confusion. Keep alcohol intake to a minimum and limit access to the bar.

Music & Noise – Loud noises can be upsetting for those who have Alzheimer’s. Consider playing light, cheerful, and familiar holiday music at a manageable volume in the common areas. If you are hosting a large party with a substantial age range, designate a separate room for loud movies, video games or dance music.

Gifting – Remember simple, soft, easy and useful when selecting gifts for “Uncle Joe.” Consider socks, slippers, easily worn and washed clothing, photo albums, books with pictures, and nightlights. Gifts such as brain games, complex puzzles, electronic games, pets, breakable items, or anything that requires assembly are not advisable.

A Quiet Place – With so many friends and family members at gatherings, the noise of conversation and laughter may become overwhelming for a person with Alzheimer’s. If possible, prepare a quiet room for “Uncle Joe” as a retreat from the party chaos. A calming activity might include browsing through family albums, watching a beloved holiday movie classic, or a restful nap.

Get Help - Connect with support when the stress of preparation and caregiving gets tough. Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles offers a 24/7 Hotline (1-844-HELP-ALZ). The hotline Care Counselors can help you determine symptoms, and provide coping tips.

About Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles

Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles is the only local full-service, dementia-focused, nonprofit with 37 years of experience and 5 locations serving Greater Los Angeles and the Inland Empire. ALZGLA provides programs and services free of charge to individuals with Alzheimer’s and related dementias, their families, caregivers and the community. Low cost training and education are also offered for professionals. For more information, call the Helpline 24/7 at 1-844-HELP-ALZ or visit www.alzgl.org.

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