

Holidays With Memory Loss

4 Tips for Sharing Holiday Pleasures

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The holidays can be a busy time of year for all of us, and the stress is magnified for dementia caregivers. Despite all the hustle and bustle, you can enjoy good holiday moments with a person with dementia -- it just takes a bit of thoughtfulness and patience. Here are some easy ideas for joyful times you can cherish together during this holiday season:

- Share a favorite holiday dish or dessert together, at a separate time and place from the main meal. Take a quiet moment simply to enjoy and reminisce about the memories the tastes conjure up.
- Listen to or sing a favorite holiday song together. Music can still elicit responses from those in the late stages of dementia, even when the person is no longer talking.
- Look at old photographs of past holiday events. Pick photos that show significant objects or places, like a Christmas tree or a church your loved one used to visit, rather than photos of people only. This way, the person won't feel pressured if she doesn't remember who's in the photos.
- The smells of the holidays are some of the best of the year. Favorites might include peppermint, pine, cinnamon, and ginger. Share a short activity that incorporates one of these scents, such as rolling balls of gingerbread cookie dough to bake (and eat!).

People with dementia live in the moment, not in the past. This is the gift they give to us. Take this gift and find a way to share some of the joy of the present. Even though your loved one might not remember it later, you will -- and the feelings of happiness will stay with both of you long after the moment is over.