

Holiday Gifts for Seniors

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C

The holidays can be both joyous and stressful for many of us. With all the preparations involved, we often struggle to find the time to complete all of our tasks, let alone enjoy the holiday season. Yet, most of us have fond memories of this wonderful time of year. You and your loved ones need to remember to make this a special time, focusing on positive memories and family experiences. To help with possible gift giving here are some creative suggestions:

1. Fast food Holiday Basket: stocked with food items that are quick and easy for the senior and also fast and nutritious.
2. Health and Beauty Basket: an assortment of the vitamins that they take on a regular basis, soaps, lotions, shampoo, etc.
3. Pre-pay telephone and or cable bill for a few months. The payment will go as a credit on their bill.
4. Large face clock or telephone with oversized keypads and adjustable volume (pre-programmed of course by a family member with all the most frequently called numbers.)
5. Gift certificates for the barber or hairdresser, neighborhood grocery store, favorite restaurant, etc.
6. Memory Box – filled with pictures and mementos of significant events in the senior's life.
7. Home Safety Box – Batteries for smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, night-lights with built in sensors. Remember “The Clapper”? This is a great gift for a senior.
8. Videotapes or DVD's of old TV shows such as Lawrence Welk, I Love Lucy, Carol Burnett, Golden Girls, Milton Berle or old movies.
9. Dinner for One (or Two) Club: prepare several dinners complete with dessert, freeze and place in their freezer for their future use. Be sure to mark what is in each container.
10. Make a “Family Memory” video. To remind the receiver how much he or she means to the family and to express your appreciation for all they have contributed over the years.

Of course the best gift we can give our loved ones (and ourselves) is meaningful time spent together. It only takes a moment to create a lasting memory.

I wish you and your family a joyous holiday season.

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and management services to older adults and their families. Please visit www.elderlifemanagement.org or call (732) 493-8080 for more information

Celebrating holidays with loved ones affected by Alzheimer's disease and dementia

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C

The holidays are a time to share with the people you love. When Alzheimer's disease and dementia affects family members and friends, some modifications may be needed in order to ensure that everyone has an equally enjoyable experience. Below are some suggestions to help assure that everyone can better appreciate the holiday season.

Involve the person with dementia in holiday activities:

- Preparing food, wrapping packages, assisting with decorations, and setting the table are all simple tasks that the person can help you with, making them feel involved in the preparation.
- Maintain the individual's normal routine so that holiday preparations do not become confusing or disruptive. Avoid using blinking lights, candles, artificial fruits and vegetables or other edibles as decorations, which may further lead to confusion.
- Build on existing traditions and memories to establish comfort and familiarity.

Gift Ideas for those affected by dementia:

- Base the type of gift on their interests and abilities. In early stages, a person may enjoy tickets to a show or musical, as well as simple games such as bingo and dominoes.
- Towards the middle and later stages of Alzheimer's, encourage people to buy useful gifts such as comfortable and easy to remove clothing, photo albums, subscriptions to magazines reflecting hobbies, videos and audiotapes of favorite music, books, animals, sports teams, destinations, etc.
- Advise people not to give gifts that may be too dangerous, challenging, or complicated.

Modify your expectations:

- Discuss holiday celebrations plans ahead of time, letting others know your caregiving situation.
- Consider inviting fewer people, having a simpler meal, having a potluck dinner, or asking others to host the holiday at their home.
- Consider celebrating holidays during lunch or brunch hours, rather than an evening meal. This may evade the confusion that the person with Alzheimer's may experience.

Caring for yourself:

- When loved ones ask what to buy you for the holiday, suggest a gift card to your favorite restaurant or store. Also, suggesting something that will help you as a caregiver, may be nice as well, such as a cleaning or household chore service, a massage or a few hours of “quiet time.”

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