

## The Family Caregiver's Guide to Senior-Friendly Birthday Celebrations

Celebrating birthdays is a cherished tradition that brings joy and connection. For caregivers of older adults and individuals with Alzheimer's, planning a birthday celebration requires thoughtful consideration and creativity.

This guide offers practical tips and ideas to help you plan a party that not only is festive but enjoyable for your loved one, making lasting memories for all.

### The Setting

#### **Choose a familiar setting.**

- A familiar setting can provide a sense of security for your loved one, especially if they have Alzheimer's or dementia.
- Consider hosting the event at their home. This way, your loved one does not have to travel. Most long-term care facilities have spaces where your family can gather.
- If not at their home, make sure that the location is senior-friendly in terms of flooring, stairs, restroom access, etc.
- Stay away from places with overwhelming stimuli, such as restaurants with loud noises or crowds. That can cause stress and confusion.

#### **Keep It simple.**

- Keep decorations simple and generic for birthdays.
- Avoid numbers for those with Alzheimer's or dementia, even for milestone birthdays. Imagine being told you're 90 years old when in your mind, you're 30.

### The Timing

#### **Be mindful of time.**

- Early afternoon is when many seniors feel their best. Avoid late afternoon and early evening, which are common times for "sundowning," a state of confusion for those with Alzheimer's or dementia.
- Allow extra time to help your loved one get ready. You do not want to have to rush them.
- Keep the celebration on the shorter side. Be aware of your loved one's mood. If you notice signs of agitation, provide them a way to leave the celebration.
- Plan activities and festivities that align with your loved one's energy levels and be flexible with the schedule to accommodate their needs.

### The Menu

#### **Include their favorites.**

- Select familiar and easy-to-eat foods, considering any dietary restrictions.
- Finger foods and bite-sized portions can make it more comfortable for your loved one to enjoy the celebration. This is especially true for those with Alzheimer's and dementia.

- Include your loved one's favorite foods on the menu. If they are able to tell you, you can ask what they would like to eat.

## The Music

### **Make a personalized playlist.**

- Music has a special power to connect with those with memory loss. A personalized playlist is also a wonderful way to celebrate anyone's birthday.
- Include songs from their childhood, their family years, and their favorite artists.
- Sing along with the songs. You might inspire your loved one to sing, too.
- Dance to the music. If your loved one is able, they may enjoy moving, clapping, and otherwise engaging with their favorite songs.

## The Activities

### **Plan activities with your loved one in mind.**

- Choose activities that match your loved one's interests and abilities, ensuring that they can participate comfortably.
- Meet the guest of honor where they are. Let them guide you through their memories.
- In the early stages of Alzheimer's and dementia, a person will be able to have conversations, though they may repeat themselves or have difficulty finding the right words. As the disease progresses, it changes how your loved one receives and processes information. Be patient and flexible.

### **Create a memory box or scrapbook.**

- A memory box or scrapbook can serve as a wonderful birthday gift for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia. Going through it can be an activity at the celebration. Again, let them guide you through their memories.
- Fill it with photos, mementos, and written memories that highlight significant moments in their life.
- Scrapbooks with captions, including names and relationships to the loved one, are helpful for providing context for the guest of honor.
- For those with Alzheimer's or dementia, avoid current photos of your loved one. Again, they may not realize that they are the age they are, and that could be upsetting.

## The Guest List

### **Keep it small.**

- Invite a few family members and/or close friends. If your loved one has Alzheimer's or dementia, they may get overwhelmed easily.
- If you want to invite more guests, stagger their arrival and departure so that each group has meaningful time with the guest of honor.
- Large crowds and loud noises can sometimes upset those with Alzheimer's or dementia. Avoid gatherings of guests that may be too loud or stressful.

### **Designate a photographer/videographer.**

- Everyone will be likely be taking pictures and videos, but it's helpful to give that role to

- someone specific.
- Capture the joy, laughter, and special moments to revisit and cherish in the future. These memories can be a source of comfort and connection.

### **A Final Word**

Know that someone with advanced Alzheimer's or dementia may not even realize the celebration is for them. That's okay. Be patient and flexible. Enjoy the time together on their terms. By incorporating familiar elements and focusing on meaningful connections, you can create a joyful and meaningful birthday celebration.

### **About the Seashore Gardens Foundation**

Seashore Gardens Foundation is a trusted nonprofit leader in promoting and enhancing services and programs for the elderly. Its mission is to enrich the quality of life for the aged in Southern New Jersey, including at Seashore Gardens Living Center. For more information, visit [seashoregardens.org](http://seashoregardens.org).