



Holiday Tips for Caregivers


For most families the holidays are filled with togetherness, sharing, laughter and memories. However, for people caring for the more than five million Americans with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, the holidays can also be filled with stress, disappointment and sadness. Because of the changes caused by dementia, families, as well as the person with the disease, may feel a special sense of loss during the holidays. Caregivers may also feel overwhelmed by trying to maintain holiday traditions while providing care. In addition, there may be some hesitation about inviting family and friends over to share the holiday for fear they will be uncomfortable with the changes they see in the person with the disease.

Here are some suggestions for creating a happy, contented and memorable holiday season for the person living with dementia and their caregivers.

Prepare Family and Friends

Familiarize family and friends with the changes in behavior and appearance that they may notice in your loved one. Give them tips for communicating and how to recognize the signs of increased anxiety in situations that may cause frustration. Provide them methods for helping to calm the person with dementia if they do become anxious or agitated.

Time Your Celebration



Celebrate during the day if possible – lunch instead of dinner – to reduce the likelihood of “Sundowner Syndrome” (evening confusion). Keep the background noise low, i.e. music low and the television off. Avoid multiple conversations, kids screaming, animals barking and being underfoot. Be mindful of the room temperature – being too cold or too hot may cause agitation in your loved one.



Embrace New Traditions

Ask everyone to wear a name tag – you can make a game out of it, and it may help reduce stress in your loved one. Consider holding a simple gathering, like a potluck instead of a formal sit-down dinner – a smaller gathering with fewer people; your family and friends will understand. Simplify all cooking, shopping and gift giving. Remove all dangerous holiday decorations and unnecessarily clutter.


Be Mindful of Body Language

Body language can be a tell-tale sign of anxiety in your loved one. Fidgeting, tapping, rubbing their face or knee, wringing their hands and bouncing their leg are just a few examples that the person with dementia may be uncomfortable in the situation. Creating a quiet room or space where they can retreat can be of great comfort and allow for one-on-one time with family and guests. This will avoid over stimulation and create a sense of calm in a world that is more often than not confusing.

Communication Tips

- Identify yourself and address the person by name.
- Never say “Remember.”
- Pay attention to your tone of voice, and theirs – dementia does NOT mean deaf.
- Show your interest by maintaining eye contact.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Ask one question at a time, and allow as much time as they need to process and respond.
- Do not point out the use of incorrect words, terms, names, dates or times.
- They cannot come to your worlds – you need to go to theirs and go with THEIR flow.
- Focus on feelings, not facts. They may not remember your face or your name, but they will remember how you make them feel.
- NEVER argue!

Quiet Time Tips

- Have a favorite movie or music on hand.
 - Prepare some simple and repetitive activities such as folding towels or napkins, wiping countertops, sorting porker chips or stacking dominos. The better you know the person the better you will be able to create the activity that works for them – don’t be shy about asking another family member or friend for ideas and help.
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- Take your loved one for a short walk or just step outside for some fresh air.
- Sitting alone with a beloved pet can be calming and therapeutic.
- Look at photo albums or magazines together.

Gift Giving Ideas for the Person with Dementia

- Easy to remove clothing in comfortable fabrics
- A soft, fluffy and warm robe or pajamas
- Sneakers with Velcro, slip on shoes, non-skid socks
- Soft and plush lap blanket
- Molding clay or watercolor paints
- Large print books
- Large piece puzzles
- Female: Having her nails painted
- Male: Sports DVDs or magazines
- A certificate good for lunch out with a friend or family member
- Most of all give them YOU. Your time, attention, hugs and LOVE!!



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