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## Holiday Tips: For Ages 1 to 92

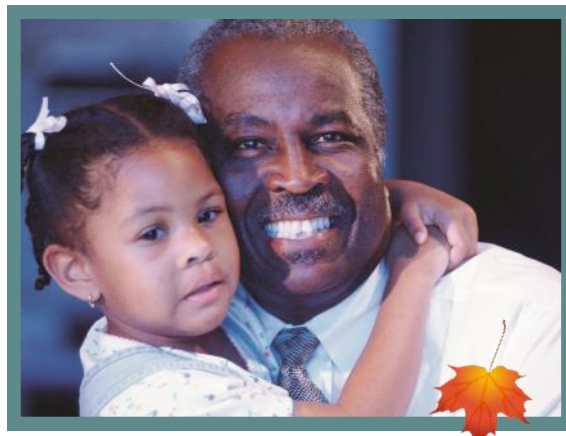
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“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans,” writes John Lennon. This lyric speaks to how busy we become during the holiday time, so busy that we often are at risk of missing out on precious family time. Planning and preparing for the holidays can be stressful and tiring even under the best of circumstances. For families and caregivers of those with dementia, this time of year can become even more challenging. Adjusting your expectation as well as organizing some pre-planning could make for a happy and memorable season.

Adhering to holiday traditions, combined with the stress of caregiving responsibilities, may take a toll on everyone involved. You do not have to live up to the expectations of others; rather set your own limits early and be clear about them. Your situation is different now. Traditional holiday activities may have to be changed to some degree. Try to invite family and friends to attend a pre-holiday meeting to discuss upcoming plans in advance. Share your caregiving situation so everyone has a realistic expectation about what you and your loved one can do. Unless it is an emergency, the holiday season is not the time to implement major change; hold off until after the first of the year to address future medical and care plans.

Modifying your expectation is a good step towards being good to yourself and may give you permission to do only what you can manage. It may be helpful to know that feelings of guilt, anger, and frustration during holiday celebrations are normal. If you have always invited a lot of people to your home, consider paring it down to a few and let others contribute. Remember that holidays are opportunities to share time with the people you love, so making these celebrations easier on yourself enables you to concentrate on enjoying your family time.



Adjusting to a simplified version of past traditions minimizes potential exhaustion for you and your loved one. If evening confusion and agitation are a problem, then consider changing a holiday dinner to a holiday lunch or brunch. This is a positive way to work around the “sundowning” that sometimes affects people with dementia.

Feeling overwhelmed in your effort to maintain holiday traditions can make you hesitant to invite family and friends over to share the holiday fearing they will react negatively to your loved one’s changed behavior. Family holidays often include visits from family and friends who have not been involved in your every day life. You may see that a few relatives are surprised at the changes in your loved one. The holidays are full of emotions so it can help to let family members and friends know what to expect before they arrive.

Explain as clearly as possible what has happened to the person with dementia. It may help to give examples of the unusual behaviors that may take place. For example, if a person is in the early stages of the disease, guests may not notice much change; but the person with dementia may have trouble following and repeating conversations. When guests are informed and aware of the situation they can help with communication by being patient, not



**Tips**

**Happy Holidays**

- \* Be flexible with old traditions
- \* Balance solitude with sociability; solitude can renew strength
- \* Relive the happy memories
- \* Set aside “letting go” time
- \* Plan smaller gatherings earlier in the day
- \* Make it a good holiday for the children, listen to them and talk to them
- \* Make new memories
- \* Show pictures of the guests to your loved one a week before they arrive
- \* Allow your loved one to participate in a new role

**Best Bet Gifts**

- \* A gift that is replaceable and unbreakable
- \* A bird feeder
- \* A tape of bird songs
- \* A baby doll
- \* Soft pillows and afghans
- \* Family photo albums
- \* ID bracelets purchased through the Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return program

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interrupting or correcting and giving the person time to finish his or her thoughts. Remind your friends and family that the person has a memory loss and does not remember what is expected and acceptable.

If friends and family have not seen your loved one in a while the visit may be painful for them. Your loved one may not remember the guest’s name or relationship. Remind friends and family that the memory loss is a result of the disease and it is

not intentional. Point out that what is important is the meaningfulness of the time spent together and not what the person remembers. It may be easier to share your loved one’s changes in a letter or email.

**Here are some examples:**

*I’m writing to let you know how things are going at our house. While we are looking forward to your visit, we thought it might be helpful if you understood the current situation before you arrive.*

*You may notice that \_\_\_ has changed since you last saw him. Among the changes you may notice are \_\_\_.*

*Because \_\_\_ sometimes has problems remembering, her behavior is a little unpredictable.*

*Please understand that \_\_\_ may not remember who you are and may confuse you with someone else. Do not be offended by this because \_\_\_ appreciates your being with us and so do I.*

*Holiday traditions, combined with the stress of caregiving responsibilities will take a toll on everyone involved. You do not have to live up to the expectations of others, rather set your own limits early, and be clear about them. Your situation is different now.*

Many families are celebrating the holiday season with a person who lives in a care facility. A holiday is still a holiday whether it is celebrated at home or at a residential care

facility. There are still many enjoyable ways to celebrate together. Often times a facility will have a planned holiday activity.

If living in a residential facility, your loved one may respond negatively to the usual high activity level of holidays. It may be unwise to

plan to take your loved on to a different environment with all the holiday excitement. If you do wish to try including them, be sure you have a plan for someone to leave with them early, if needed. Often they tire rapidly and request to return to their home.

**Remember the children**



Dementia has a big impact on children. Remember that the young people in your life look forward to holiday family time and they may have questions about what is happening. It is important that time be made to speak with children openly and honestly.

Dementia influences many factors that may affect children such as sadness, confusion and fear. Children may become afraid of the different ways in which the person now acts, propelling curiosity about how people get the disease and if it is contagious.

Keep open lines of communication with the young ones; good communication is the best way to help him or her deal with the changes. Teach children about the disease and encourage them to ask questions. Reassure them that just because a person in the family has the disease it does not mean others will definitely get it.

[Click here](#) and visit [Greenfield Library for Kids](#)



**TOOLS Holiday Activities Children Can Share with a Loved One**

- Bake cookies
- Take a walk around the neighborhood
- Put a puzzle together
- Play Hangman
- Color or draw pictures
- Make a scrapbook of family photos
- Read a favorite story