

Caregiving Through the Holidays

Holidays can be meaningful, enriching times for both the person with dementia and his or her family. Maintaining or adapting family rituals and traditions helps all family members feel a sense of belonging and family identity. For a person with dementia, this link with a familiar past is reassuring. The tips below can help you and the person with dementia visit and reconnect with family, friends, and neighbors during holidays.

Finding the Right Balance

Many caregivers have mixed feelings about holidays. They may have happy memories of the past, but they also may worry about the extra demands that holidays make on their time and energy.

Here are some ways to balance many holiday-related activities while taking care of your own needs and those of the person with dementia:

- ✓ Celebrate holidays that are important to you. Include the person with dementia as much as possible. Also find time for holiday activities you like to do. Accept invitations to celebrations even if the person with dementia is unable to attend. Ask a friend or family member to spend time with the person while you're out.
- ✓ Set your own limits, and be clear about them with others. You do not have to live up to the expectations of friends or relatives. Your situation is different now.
- ✓ Involve the person with dementia in simple holiday preparations, or have him or her observe your preparations. Observing you will familiarize him or her with the upcoming festivities. Participating with you may give the person the pleasure of helping and the fun of anticipating and reminiscing.
- ✓ Encourage friends and family to visit even if it's difficult. Limit the number of visitors at any one time, or have a few people visit quietly with the person in a separate room.
- ✓ Photos are an excellent connection to the past and to your guests. Help make that connection by reviewing photos with the guests the day they are visiting. Also, if the person with dementia becomes upset or overstimulated, the family photo albums can help as a quiet distraction for the individual.
- ✓ Try to avoid situations that may confuse or frustrate the person, such as crowds, changes in routine, and strange places. Also try to stay away from noise, loud conversations, loud music, lighting that is too bright or too dark, and having too much rich food or drink.

Preparing Guests

Explain to guests that the person with dementia does not always remember what is expected and acceptable. Give examples of unusual behaviors that may take place such as incontinence, eating food with fingers, wandering, or hallucinations.

- ✓ If this is the first visit since the person has become severely impaired as a result of dementia, tell guests that the visit may be painful. The memory-impaired person may not remember guests' names or relationships but can still enjoy their company.
- ✓ Explain that memory loss is the result of the disease and is not intentional.
- ✓ Stress that the meaningfulness of the moment together matters more than what the person remembers. Focus on the essence of who the person is now and what chapter they are now living in their life.
- ✓ Some key communication tips to consider:
 - * Keep questions simple – possibly to yes or no answers
 - * Do not try to reason or argue
 - * Loud voices can be interpreted as angry
 - * Stay calm – body language is important

Preparing the Person with Dementia

Here are some tips to help the person with dementia get ready for visitors:

- ✓ Keep the memory-impaired person's routine as close to normal as possible. Structure and routine is important.
- ✓ During the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, guard against fatigue and find time for adequate rest.
- ✓ Provide physical and mental activities the person can do.
- ✓ Support the person's dignity and self-esteem at all times.

For more information go to: www.MindandMemory.org