



Tips for Family Gatherings & Holidays: A Guide for Dementia Caregivers

Thanksgiving, birthdays and other family gatherings –

Rituals, families, feasts and holiday celebrations all make life more meaningful. Dementia doesn't put an end to enjoying family get-togethers. Small changes can make the holidays happier for everybody. Think about how you can make it work well.

1. Include your loved one as much as possible – Share food, camaraderie and memories. But reserve quiet times and spaces when needed. Too much hustle and bustle can be overwhelming.
2. Prepare others – Notes or calls can help prepare other guests to communicate more effectively with your loved one. Suggest ways they can help that person feel safe, welcomed and loved.
3. Ask everyone to create a fun nametag on arrival to wear during the family gathering.
4. Adjust the setting – Consider your loved one's strengths and limitations, such as energy, appetite and attention span. Small groups may be less confusing than large ones. Gather when your loved one usually is most alert, perhaps for lunchtime. Limit noise and distractions, such as yipping pets, fireworks, lots of doorbell ringing or loud music.
5. Pick a designated companion -- Consider asking someone to stay with your loved one during the gathering, keeping him or her engaged or taking a quiet-time break in a different room or recliner. It's a task several people can take turns sharing.
6. Offer family activities -- Photo albums and appropriate games can help everyone be engaged. An excellent resource is a free "Memory Minders: A Kit for Caregivers" from the Roseville Library.
7. Keep a normal routine -- Stay as close to a normal schedule as possible. For example, bathing and eating times should be on a similar schedule at home or when visiting others.
8. Stay flexible and have backup plans – Things rarely go as planned, but that can be OK. Mom wants to take a nap? Fine. Or sit quietly watching from a chair? That's OK. Or just go home? Don't take any of it personally. Mom is doing the best she can, and so are you.

Halloween –

This holiday traditionally has been a little scary. For loved ones with Alzheimer's disease or similar conditions, here are some tips to keep them comfortable and safe.

1. Make sure your loved one has company -- Even cute trick or treaters can be confusing or frightening to someone with dementia. It's also a time of year when burglars or scam artists may take advantage of the holiday. Your presence can help keep things calm and safe.
2. Choose fun (not scary) Halloween decorations – Carved pumpkins probably won't be too scary, but skeletons might be. Avoid motion- or sound-activated decorations that make loud or spooky sounds. If it scares a kid, it might scare an adult with dementia.
3. Don't use candles or glowing lights – Flickering lights and a glow from a jack-o-lantern can anxiety or fear in someone with dementia.
4. Monitor the television – Horror movies abound on TV around Halloween. Even one frightening scene can leave a lasting impression on someone with Alzheimer's.
5. Create your own Halloween traditions – Some people with dementia are OK answering the door to cute trick-or-treaters. But this might be a good time to do seasonal crafts, watch a fun movie or look at old photos. Consider focusing on autumn and looking forward to Thanksgiving.