

PLANNING AHEAD FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

It's hard to believe that the winter holidays are almost here! If you are caring for an older adult you are probably trying to decide when your family's traditional holiday celebration will take place this year and who will be invited. Like many family care providers you'll need to plan ahead for festivities that are easy to manage and don't need lots of complicated food preparation or cleanup so you can enjoy the holiday celebration too.

Friends and family members are more than ready to assist with cooking, cleanup and keeping older adults entertained. Don't hesitate to ask friends and family members to lend a helping hand by putting up the tree and other holiday decorations, bringing a special dessert or side dish.

Guests can record the celebration by taking holiday photographs, and helping with clean-up chores when the festivities are over. Friends and relations who are familiar to your parent can keep older adult guests amused with reminiscences and jokes and keep them occupied while the holiday feast is under preparation.

If out-of-town guests haven't seen your parent recently, explain before they arrive that your parent's health or memory may have declined since the last time they saw him. Keep in mind that a family member with Alzheimer's or other memory disorder may become confused and overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of too many guests – some of who he may no longer recognize. As a caregiver you may be able to tell if your parent needs a brief time-out and some comforting words from you or guests.

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

Christmas and other winter holidays are a great time to take your parent shopping for cards and presents at the mall or browsing for gifts through catalogs. You both can spend time together choosing and wrapping presents for friends, family, and acquaintances while reminiscing about holidays from the past. If your parent attends an adult day program he or she may create special holiday cards and decorations that can be shared with friends and family members.

During the holiday season rent or borrow favorite holiday videos such as Bing Crosby's "White Christmas," Mr. Magoo's Christmas," "A Christmas Story," or "Miracle on 34th St." that the whole family will enjoy. If weather permits take a short walk or drive around your neighborhood and admire the holiday decorations. An older relative may enjoy reading "The Night Before Christmas" to grandchildren.

If you celebrate with guests and relatives you don't see often make it a point to take holiday photos to commemorate the holiday get-together and send them prints.

An older parent with cooking abilities will enjoy helping to prepare special holiday dishes and treats with your help and supervision. People with memory loss can enjoy opening holiday cards as they arrive and put them up over the fireplace, assist with decorating the tree, windows or doorways, and wrap gifts with some help from other family members. While you decorate, ask your relative about how he or she celebrated holidays when she was young.

If you celebrate holidays with guests you don't see often make it a point to take holiday photos to commemorate the occasion and send them copies.

MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS

Christmas and other holidays can be especially stressful not only for people with memory disorders but also those who care for them. In addition to routine household chores, caregivers are also responsible for extra holiday tasks like cooking, baking, tree-trimming, addressing cards, wrapping gifts and other seasonal duties.

As a caregiver it's important to give yourself some respite during this busy time of year. A short nap or other "time-out" to rest and relax will not only help you regain your energy but also to appreciate what this special season means to your family and yourself.

- For a more relaxed and meaningful holiday, choose activities that are most meaningful and enjoyable to your family and skip the rest. These might include: Attending seasonal religious services, making a donation to a favorite charity
- Keeping the guest list to a minimum so your parent doesn't become confused or overwhelmed by all the food and unfamiliar faces.
- Encourage guests to bring favorite side dishes, desserts or table decorations.
- Use holiday paper plates and plastic utensils instead of your grandmother's china. They won't break and you won't have to wash them.

HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

As a caregiver you may find it difficult to choose holiday, birthday, and gifts for other occasions for a family member with memory loss. Some suggestions:

- Dolls and stuffed toys
- Easy crossword and puzzle books
- Warm socks, slippers, robes and pajamas
- Family photograph albums.
- Fruit basket, favorite plant, or flowers
- Hand and body lotion
- Tickets to movies, concerts or sports events.
- Bird feeder
- Holiday and birthday cards created by grandchildren and other young relatives.

SPECIAL HOLIDAY MEMORIES

Holidays often have a special meaning for older adults and their family members. They are set aside to acknowledge the passage of time, the celebration of significant events in people's lives, and an opportunity for families and friends to come together and celebrate a special occasion like a holiday or birthday. By making the most of these special events you and others in your family will remember the older people who have been an important part of their lives. [887/11/2010]