

Surviving the Holidays with Dementia

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The holidays can be a tough time for those with [dementia](#) and their families.

Dementia is not a disease, rather a collection of symptoms stemming from brain injury or disease. The symptoms include memory loss, impaired thinking, and personality changes. I recently came across some helpful tips from the Alzheimer's Association to help those with dementia and their families still enjoy the season. It can be a shock to many family members who may have not visited in a while to see the decline in a loved one with dementia.

It's important to know which dementia your loved one has. There are a number of types of dementia including:

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Navigating the holidays with a loved one suffering from dementia can be difficult, but we are here to help.”
Dawn Pudlin, CK Ft. Myers

- Lewy Body Dementia (the second most common form of dementia)
- Alzheimer's Disease (the most common form of dementia)
- Vascular Dementia
- Wernicke-Korsafoff Syndrome

Norman Pressure Hydrocephalus
Huntington's Disease

There is also mixed dementia, which is having more than one type of dementia (e.g. vascular dementia and Alzheimer's). You should also know the stage of dementia your loved one is in. Stages range from mild (forgetfulness) to very severe (cannot communicate). When your elderly parent begins to have memory loss, it is important to have him or her examined by a physician for Lewy Body or Parkinson's to ensure the correct diagnosis, since they have similar symptoms. Robin Williams was misdiagnosed with Parkinson's disease when it was finally determined that he had Lewy Body dementia. Sadly, the diagnosis contributed to Williams' decision to take his own life.

In the past ten years, there have been great strides in learning about dementia and how to manage it. For example, in California, there is a community created solely for the care of dementia patients. It is called Glenner Town Square and it resembles a fictitious town from 1951 – 1963. This time period reflects the memories of the patients when they were in their late twenties to early thirties. There is a range of services, including adult day care and support groups. Everything in the town, from the buildings to the furniture, was designed to make the “residents” comfortable and safe.

Also, there is a new healthcare software program to guide dementia patients through their treatment and referral process. The program, MAXIMS Dementia System, will help capture data to improve diagnosis, care, and payment process.

Making the older adults in your life feel happy and safe is paramount. And you always want to make the holidays a cheerful time for those coping with dementia, along with their families.

Check-In

You may not see much change in a loved one with experiencing onset dementia, but those with the beginning stages of dementia usually start to withdraw and not want to socialize. The loved one may begin to exhibit aggressive behavior or perform an inappropriate sexual act. Still, check in with your loved ones and always offer for them to join in on your gatherings. Discuss options with them and ask them about their feelings about attending. You never want to force them but want them to feel welcomed. For those with the middle and late stages of dementia, family activities and gatherings might be too much, since they have trouble with daily living activities. However, you should never leave them out. Think about maybe just having people visit your loved one, in small groups and for short amounts of time.

It's also good to let [dementia caregivers](#) know just how much they are appreciated, especially this time of year. A family caregiver is struggling to balance his or her own family while providing quality dementia care to his or her elderly parent. It is very hard to see the quality of life a parent decline, and very easy for the caregiver to become sad and depressed. And with Parkinson's disease, the impaired movement is even more of a challenge. This is when respite care is vital, so the caregiver can take a break and get out of the house (e.g. holiday shopping). This much-needed self-care will provide a boost. If you are considering using respite care for the first time and feel guilty about it – don't. You need to take care of yourself and your family. Don't forget to join a support group or even see a social worker to vent and find additional resources. Also, some find strength in God to help through difficult times.

Be Honest

Always be honest and upfront with your guests. Let them know what to expect if a loved one with dementia will be attending. They may not notice too many changes early on, but they might notice that conversing with them can be difficult. Remind them to remain patient when the loved one starts repeating words and getting confused. This is the early stage of dementia (i.e. short-term memory loss). When guests are aware of the situation, they can help make the person feel comfortable and social.

For those experiencing middle to late stages of dementia, cognitive changes will be more noticeable. These dementia patients will not be able to recall their personal information, such as phone number or home address. Safety is a top concern since wandering is one of the difficult behaviors to manage in the later stages. It might be challenging for some to accept how much their loved ones have declined, and that home care is no longer part of their care options.

It is a good idea to share the status in a letter and/or email. You can also include a list of tips, like these. If your guests would like more information before the visit, you can provide them with a list of resources, including the Alzheimer's Association and the Parkinson's Foundation. They can also learn more about the responsibilities of family caregiver with the Family Caregiver Alliance. This non-profit organization is a wonderful resource center for family members of caregivers as well. Encourage your guests to be open, respectful and understanding.

Traditions

Some traditions will be good for those with dementia, where others might not be the best. Also, don't be let down when your loved one might not remember or understand traditions. Be patient and make the experience fun. You might even have to change some traditions up to help those with dementia to adapt easily, especially if he or she is in a nursing home or a senior living community. Try to limit the sweets and offer sugar-free candy and always be careful with the decorations you choose. Fake food could be mistaken as real food and blinking lights could cause confusion.

Socialize

It is still important to make sure your loved one feels involved during the holiday season. You might need to adjust plans. For example, if they are living in a facility, try to join in on the activities they have. Bring goodies and games to include everyone. Sing songs, share stories and even partake in traditions with a group of residents. This will help your loved one stay social and involved during the season.

The entire team at SMART Brain Aging wishes everyone and their families a very Happy Holiday season. For more information on helping those with dementia adjust to the holidays, visit the Alzheimer's Association.

Providing Home Care Services in Fort Myers

At Comfort Keepers, we understand how hard it is to see your loved one suffer from dementia. We help older people with dementia have a fruitful life with our range of services. Whether you need a full-time help for Alzheimer's or part-time for companionship, we have the service for your need. Contact us today to learn more!

About Comfort Keepers Fort Myers:

Comfort Keepers Fort Myers is a leading provider of senior care services for elderly adults and their families in Fort Myers, FL, and the surrounding areas. We are an in-home care services agency, and our team of caregivers and health aides is dedicated to ensuring that your senior loved one leads the best quality of life from the comforts of his or her own home. We offer in-home care, respite care, dementia and Alzheimer's care, and many more. Call us today at 239-590-8999 for information about the services we provide and with any questions you may have.

This release was drafted by [Results Driven Marketing, LLC](#): a full-service digital marketing, public relations, advertising and content marketing firm located in Philadelphia, PA.

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