



Redwood Falls

ACT on Alzheimer's NEWSLETTER

Volume 5

Holidays & Alzheimer's Families

The holidays are a time when family and friends often come together. But for families living with Alzheimer's and other dementias, the holidays can be challenging. With some planning and adjusted expectations your celebrations can still be a happy memorable occasions. But it is important to plan ahead to help someone with dementia get the most out of holidays.

Inform Guests of what to Expect. The holidays are full of emotions so it can help to let guests know what to expect before they arrive.

If the person is in the early stages of Alzheimer's relatives and friends might not notice any changes. But the person with dementia may have trouble following conversation or tend to repeat him or herself. Family can help with communication by being patient, not interrupting or correcting and giving the person time to finish his or her thoughts.

If the person is in the middle or late stages of Alzheimer's, there may be significant changes in cognitive abilities since the last time an out-of-town friend or relative has visited. These changes can be hard to accept. Make sure visitors understand that changes in behavior and memory are caused by the disease and not the person.

You may want to let friends and relatives know about the changes in a holiday card, letter or e-mail that can be sent to multiple recipients. Here are some examples.

I am writing to let you know how things are going at our house.

While we're looking forward to your visit we thought it might be helpful if you understood our current situation before your arrive.

- Because Grandpa Joe sometimes has problems remembering and thinking clearly, his behavior is a little unpredictable.
- Please understand that Grandpa Joe may not remember who you are and may confuse you with someone else. Please don't feel offended by this. He appreciates your being with us and so do I.

Not able to continue doing the things they have traditionally done in the past.

For a mom with Alzheimer's who has always taken on meal planning and preparation, the holidays may simply prove to be too overwhelming. As the disease steals the ability to perform daily tasks like doing the grocery shopping, following a recipe or even setting a table may be too complicated with too many steps to remember and follow

For dads who traditionally host the viewing of the holiday football game, crowds of people all talking at once may cause anxiety and even anger as the ability to keep track of conversations decrease.

If evening confusion and agitation are a problem, consider changing a holiday dinner with a holiday lunch or brunch.

Of course we do want to continue to involve the person with dementia. We can focus on activities that are meaningful to the person with dementia. Your family member may find comfort in singing old holiday songs or looking through old photo albums

As the persons' abilities allow, invite him or her to help you prepare food, wrap packages, help decorate or set the table. This could be as simple as having the person measure an ingredient or hand the decorations to you as you put them on the tree.

A little thank you goes a long way

After the holidays, write a thank you note to family members or friends who spent time with your loved one. Emphasize the positive impact that their visit or time spent with your loved one had on them. This may reinforce positive feelings from their visit and diminish any discomfort they experienced. They may then be more encouraged to visit again or be more supportive of your efforts.

For more information about Redwood Falls ACT on Alzheimer's call or e-mail Karen Christensen, ACT on Alzheimer's Coordinator at 507-627-1016 or ace.redwood@co.redwood.mn.us

Your input and assistance is valuable. Let's ACT together as we work to create a dementia capable community.