

HAVE A SIMPLER, MORE ENJOYABLE HOLIDAY

By Guest Columnist Mel Kelley, Early Memory Loss Collaborative



Holidays can be a stressful time for any of us.
For folks with memory loss and their caregivers they can be
challenging and even isolating.
For a happier, healthier holiday try these simple suggestions.

1. Keep the gathering small...6-8 people max if you can. If you must have more than 8, set two tables in separate areas far enough apart that you can't hear conversation from one table to the other.
2. Communicate with all guests beforehand inviting them to join you in making the day more manageable for the person with dementia. Explain to them that your goal will be A QUIETER holiday...one person speaking at a time, everyone else listening. Keep distractions to a minimum. Even beloved and well-mannered pets can be bothersome to someone who isn't used to them. No TV or other noise in the background. If music is part of your tradition choose soft instrumental pieces during meals and conversation time.
3. Plan your party in the 12-4 time period if possible. Many folks with dementia are challenged by sundowning late in the day. If the event lasts longer than 2-3 hours, arrange for your loved one to leave for a time of rest and quiet.
4. Make the most of a "teachable moment" with young people before the day begins, i.e. "Grandpa can't focus as well as he used to but he loves a holiday. Let's all work together to create a special day for him. We are so blessed and lucky to have him and Gran with us. How can you make it better for him?"
5. Honor your caregiver guests by "giving them a break" if possible. Designate a familiar adult or older grandchild as "Grandpa's buddy" thereby freeing up the caregiver to connect with family members and get lots of support and love.
6. Set a table with clear color variations...i.e. white plates on a colored tablecloth or colored plates on a white cloth. Folks with dementia often have depth perception and other vision issues. Prepare in advance for caregivers to cut meat, butter bread, or otherwise prepare the plate before taking it to the table as to not embarrass your guest. Allow them to do their best at the table without comment.
7. Make sure you have more than one gathering area for before and after the meal. Designate one the QUIET area. No more than 3 or 4 people in here at a time. Family members and friends may take turns to visit with Grandpa one on one.
8. Try to include your special guest as much as possible. If they want to help, let them do so in whatever way they can, perhaps teaming them with a grown child or an older grandchild. If they carried a family

tradition in the past...carving the turkey, saying the blessing, reciting a poem, try to find a way for them to do so this year too.

9. Surprise your guests with enough leftovers for at least one full meal. Caregivers will be extra delighted!

BE FULLY PRESENT and savor each moment of this special day!



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