Holiday Stress and Caregiving

While everyone is enjoying the joy of the holiday season, there are many caregivers who just want the whole thing over with. Caregiving creates a level of stress unmatched by most endeavors. Add to that the extra stress of family gatherings, gift buying, cooking, and it is almost unbearable.

The following tips may help:

1. *Avoid being bound by past traditions.* Instead of hosting family members and guests, suggest that someone else host or enlist the help of friends and relatives for everything from cleaning to preparing food. A potluck is a great idea—you can even assign specific dishes!
2. *Shop non-traditionally as well.* The Internet or catalogs are fantastic ways to shop for food and gifts without leaving home. If you would rather go out, make lists of specific gifts for each person including where to go to get them.
3. *Make sure you leave enough time to enjoy the holidays.* It shouldn't be all about the hustle and bustle.
4. *Everything in moderation.* There are many temptations throughout the season---alcohol, sweets and rich food. Enjoy but don't over-indulge..
5. *Be prepared for unexpected circumstances.* Something may come up, and probably will, so remain flexible. If you can't change the situation, accept it and move on. Remember to laugh a lot!
6. *Continue your regular exercise routine (or start one) during the holidays.* Walking is a great way to stay in shape and there is something about pounding the pavement that helps release frustrations and clears your head. In wintery weather, you can walk on indoor tracks or in the nearest shopping mall. Some malls open early just for walkers.

Source: www.caregiver.com

Ideally caregivers should have a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly break.

- Daily-Half an hour of yoga, meditation, needlepoint, reading, etc.
- Weekly-A couple of hours spent away from the house at the mall, library, coffeehouse, etc.
- Monthly-An evening out with your friends, a play, a concert, etc.
- Yearly-A well-planned (and well-deserved) vacation.

Planning ahead for these breaks is imperative. You may need to arrange for respite care for your loved one.

Happy Holidays.

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Peace for the Holidays

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The best of times, the worst of times might well describe the holiday experience of loved ones of people with dementia. With some reflection, planning and flexibility, the balance can be shifted from the worst to the best. Integrate the following suggestions as you plan your holiday events to create memories that bring laughter not tears and help you find joy in the moments.

PRIORITIZE Decide which family traditions are most important and which parts of those are truly meaningful. While the person with dementia may not be able to tolerate the entire ritual, often they can participate in well-chosen components.

EMPATHIZE View events through the eyes of the person with dementia. Changes in routines and environments can be difficult and frightening. Think about how decorations and events might confuse or be misinterpreted by the person with dementia.

ADJUST Consider modifying or simplifying plans. For example, small changes such as changing the time of an event to coincide with the person's best time of day or limiting numbers of people in the environment at any one time might make the experience better for everyone. Watch for signs of stress or distress and help the person find a place and time to relax and recover.

CAPTURE Record the memories of the person with dementia by encouraging reminiscence and storytelling to preserve family history. Use props like pictures, foods and decorations to trigger forgotten memories. Take candid multi-generational photos or video-they can be more touching and much easier than posed portraits.

ENJOY Make memories. Don't get so involved in the plans you forget the point of the activity or event. The experience might not be like it used to be, but you can still find the magical moments. Especially for the person who is grieving: Holidays are difficult when you're experiencing the loss or the losing of someone you care about. Be patient with yourself as you grieve and find support in comforting rituals and people. Do what's right for you as you look for new ways to find **Peace in the Holidays**.

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