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HOLIDAYS—GOING BACK TO A SIMPLER TIME

It's no secret that the holiday season has become increasingly complicated with a heavy focus on commercialism—lots of shopping, busy malls, huge meals, many parties...the list goes on. While some people may enjoy making detailed desserts that look like a Martha Stewart display, many others find it stressful. When did all this pressure become the norm?

If you ask your grandparents what Christmas used to be like, I'll bet they would tell you a different story. If they were of the generation that lived through the depression era, you can be certain that there was very little—if any—Christmas shopping to be done.

Instead, the focus was on being together with loved ones, and participating in activities together. Rather than rushing around trying to have everything in perfect



order before family arrived, the focus was on doing things together as a family. Decorations were much simpler, but usually included extended family members. Popcorn was strung and used as a garland, hung outside for the birds to enjoy. Fruit featured prominently in décor—orange peels

were used creatively as little baskets, or peels were dried and cut into shapes.

These simple traditions are low-cost and allow everyone to focus on quality time together, rather than individually rushing about stressing about fancy décor. Perhaps this year you can slow down the pace of the holiday season and revert to some time-honoured traditions from your grandparents' era. What a special tribute for your grandparents or great-grandparents this holiday season!



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:	
6 Holiday Tips When A Loved One Has Dementia	2-3
Coping Through the Holidays	4





6 HOLIDAY TIPS WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS DEMENTIA

Do you ever find the holidays overwhelming? There's music and lights, decorations and crowds, shopping and cooking, parties and dinners, rich food and alcohol, late nights and busy days—sometimes it feels like you need a holiday to recover from the Christmas season!

If we can sometimes feel overwhelmed at season—and we are cognitively well, our brain is fully working—then imagine how overwhelming the holidays may be for someone who has dementia. Someone with dementia may not remember what “Christmas” or “the holidays” mean—they become abstract terms.

Here are some holiday tips to help a loved one with dementia through the holidays.

1. Beware of Decorations

You see an impressively life-like St. Nicholas welcoming people to your front hallway, but what does your loved one with dementia see? Is she concerned about “the man in the hallway who isn't having dinner?” Life-like or oversized decorations can be confusing or even scary to someone with dementia. Consider from their perspective how the decorations could be misinterpreted.

Flashing lights draw a mixed response. Some people with dementia are mesmerized by flashing lights; others become alarmed or agitated. Keep consistent bright lighting in all rooms. Dark rooms with candle light or just the tree lights may be fearful for someone with dementia.

Remove all ornaments that are not edible but look like real food. Fake gingerbread men or houses, fake candy canes or apple ornaments should all be avoided. Someone with dementia may not realize that it is just an ornament and may attempt to eat the decoration.



2. Have a Quiet Room

You want to include your loved one who has dementia, but you also need to provide a space where they can retreat and have some peace and quiet. People with dementia typically interact best in small groups or one-on-one. If a loved one with dementia is attending a large family gathering, set up a separate room—well lit with comfortable furniture—and recommend that family take turns visiting that person, one at a time. This allows for quality interaction in a way that best matches your loved one's needs.

3. Maintain Routine

Routine is often the first casualty of the holiday season. We stay up late at night, we don't eat meals at the usual time and we often stray from our usual, healthy diet. Remember how you felt last January after eating heavily and having your routine interrupted? Now imagine someone with dementia. The person with dementia cannot rationalize why they feel different, all they know is that something doesn't feel right.

As much as possible, keep routine familiar and consistent. Try to maintain regular meal times (even if that means eating separately from the party), and try to limit intake of rich, sugary foods or excessive alcohol. Respect nap times and bed times—sleep is as important as ever!

By maintaining routine as much as possible, your loved one may be able to better handle the surprises that come with the season.

4. Forewarn Family

If family members live at a distance, they may be visiting for the first time since last holiday season. Your loved one may have changed significantly since last holiday season. Advise family and friends in advance so that they know what to expect. Request their assistance in making the holidays easier for your loved one, and outline exactly what you need them to do. Here are some suggestions:



...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

- Please do not ask “do you know who I am?” this causes undue stress. While she may not be able to name you, grandma knows you are an important person whom she loves.



- Please be aware of the fact that

mom now needs to take some time away from the crowd. She finds noise and groups overwhelming. We will have a Quiet Room set up and we invite you to visit mom one at a time in the quiet room.

- Please do not encourage alcohol consumption by saying “it’s only one drink!”. Dad is now on a medications that do not react well to alcohol and he will not enjoy the event as much when he is trying to process the alcohol.

5. Set Realistic Expectations

Be sure to set realistic expectations for you and for your loved one. Another whole article could be dedicated to family caregivers setting realistic expectations, so for this article the focus will be on the person with dementia.

Set realistic expectations for your loved one by limiting the number of events they attend. No more than one event or activity in a given day; only a few in a week with recovery time between events.

Step back and try to assess what is realistic for your loved one. Maybe a dinner with 50 people will not be a successful event, but attending a hymn singing would better match your loved one’s preferences and current abilities.

Your loved one will not be able to suddenly do more or handle more because it is the holiday season. If anything, their coping abilities may be taxed and they may become agitated or stressed more easily than usual. Be realistic when scheduling the season.

6. Select the Top Priority

What is more important—that your loved one attend every event and every tradition is followed in detail, or that your loved one has a merry Christmas feeling loved and happy? If the top priority is your loved one having a wonderful Christmas season, then focus on the elements that create that sense of joy, peace, and love for them. If you really analyze it, you’ll realize it has nothing

to do with decorations or traditions. It has everything to do with family and interaction.

If you are stressed because of holiday prep, your loved one will feel that stress and not enjoy the season. A person with dementia would rather have you slow down, match their pace, and be patient, than present a tray with 15 varieties of home baked cookies that stressed you out! Your loved one with dementia might enjoy singing a few familiar Christmas carols (because the words of those favourite tunes tend to stick), rather than feel the pressure of keeping up with animated conversation at a cocktail event.

What will make your loved one smile? When will they seem most at peace? What will have them feeling safe, secure, and loved? Aim to focus on those elements and your loved one will have a truly blessed Christmas.





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providing meaningful
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Warm Embrace Elder Care is owned and operated by a mother-daughter team, Brenda Hamilton and her daughters, Chloe and Avery Hamilton. Their goal is to assist seniors to remain independent for as long as possible through offering various services such as homecare, memory therapy, and one-on-one home exercise for seniors. Inspired by personal experience with family caregiving for Brenda's mother, this mother-daughter team understands firsthand the benefits of enlisting help while caring for a loved one. Warm Embrace believes that independence does not mean that you can do everything by yourself, but rather that you get to choose how everything is done—we grant our seniors the respect and dignity they deserve by helping them to live as they desire.

COPING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

While the holiday season can be a wonderful time for many people, for others, it can be a particularly difficult time. Some people experience increased depression, isolation and loneliness which affect both mental and physical health. For some older adults, the

holidays generate feelings of sadness as they think about loved ones who have passed away, or traditions that are no longer honoured. They may have health concerns that are troublesome or financial concerns that are heightened because of the holidays.

7th, Marilyn White-Campbell will be presenting on these complex issues that surround the holidays. Marilyn is an excellent speaker with over 30 years experience in working with older adults with substance abuse.

Marilyn will present ways to manage holiday stress and make healthy choices—healthy choices for both mind and body.

Date: Wednesday, December 7, 2016

Time: 1:00pm

Location: Room 3, Evergreen Seniors Community Centre

Cost: FREE!

RSVP: please call Pat Gage at 519 837 5696 to register



The holidays are often associated with increased alcohol consumption and for seniors on many medications, that can be a concern. On December