

# Tips for holiday cheer

Holiday celebrations and religious festivities are traditionally a time for family gatherings, the exchange of gifts, sharing food and drink, and general holiday cheer. However, it can also be a stressful time because it represents a break from normal routine. This sheet gives some useful tips on how to make life easier at these times.

## Tips for families, friends and carers

Try and make holiday times easy upon yourself and others so that you can relax and enjoy the time together. The following tips often refer specifically to Christmas time, but they are also a useful guide for other gatherings and religious celebrations.

### 1. Modify the environment

Look for triggers that may cause confusion for the person with dementia and change the environment if necessary. For example, at Christmas, these triggers may be in the form of edible looking artificial table decorations such as fruits, sweets or blinking Christmas lights. Consider a Christmas tree without lights, and place a tray underneath if the person with dementia is likely to water it.

### 2. Share the caring

Create opportunities for family members and friends to share the caring role. They may assist by hosting an event in their home. Or, go out as a group for a specific activity, like a small local carols by candlelight or a church service.

### 3. Aim for flexibility

Consider the best time to share a celebratory meal, bearing in mind that a change in routine may be confusing for a person with dementia. Try to stick to the routine of the person with dementia to minimise possible feelings of insecurity and stress that may occur.

#### **4. Rest and quiet times are important**

Taking on too many tasks or trying to maintain past traditions may increase the feeling of being overwhelmed by the demands of the occasion. Pace yourself and allow time and space in your day for rest and quiet times. Where possible maintain your normal routines and ensure that there are occasions that are not filled with activity and noise. People with dementia may also need quiet times and to be around smaller groups of people.

#### **5. Gift giving and receiving**

Encourage the person with dementia to be involved in gift preparation and giving, according to their interest and their ability. Bake biscuits and pack them in boxes, wrap gifts or write cards together. It's also helpful to suggest gift ideas to family and friends.

#### **6. Involve the person with dementia**

Assisting with simple event or meal preparation activities is important in maintaining a sense of well-being for the person with dementia. If attempts to provide assistance cause anxiety or confusion, modify the task or provide an alternative activity such as folding serviettes.

#### **7. Reminiscence supports shared memories**

The festive season may trigger memories of past family events spent with loved ones. Listening, sharing recollections with each other and encouraging reminiscence can be a reassuring and validating experience for everyone involved. Singing Christmas carols and traditional songs and watching old movies can be enjoyable for young and old.

## 8. Seek emotional support

Christmas is a time when both the person with dementia and family members may feel a sense of loss. This may impact more strongly upon those people without family members or those who may be living away from their family. Recognising emotional needs and seeking support during this period may reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

### Further Information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at [dementia.org.au](http://dementia.org.au)



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**