

Celebrating **Holiday Traditions** with Older Loved Ones

from Right at Home



The Right Care, Right at Home®

Celebrating Holiday Traditions with Older Loved Ones



Whether your family celebrates Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, Diwali or another winter celebration, you are probably making preparations right now. Your traditions, special recipes and heirloom decorations may have been handed down from some of the very family members who are now the beloved elders at your celebration.

But as the years go by, senior loved ones often experience changes in health, and it becomes time to adjust our family traditions. Here are some situations to consider:

A loved one with hearing loss. People with hearing problems can feel isolated in a crowded gathering. Reduce background noise as much as possible—save the loud Christmas music for later. Remind guests to face your loved one and speak slowly and clearly, and encourage your loved one to use their hearing aids.

A loved one with vision loss. People with age-related eye problems need good lighting. Dining

by candlelight might mean they can't see what they're eating. Dim lighting also raises their risk of falling. And keep empty boxes and new toys picked up.

A loved one with dementia. When an elder is living with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder, holiday plans usually need to be modified. If the family member hosting the gathering is the primary caregiver, they may already have their hands full. A simplified celebration is in order, or maybe it's time for other family members to take on some of the shopping, decorating and cooking.

Then, as much as is possible, help the family member with dementia remain part of the celebration. Here are some tips:

- Try to maintain your loved one's routine as much as possible—bedtime, mealtime, medications and exercise.
- If possible, enable your loved one to help with baking, decorating and wrapping gifts.

- Your loved one may still have memories of holidays past. Encourage them to share their thoughts.
- Before the gathering (in person or online), go through a photo album to remind your loved one about people who they will see. Ask guests to wear name tags.
- Set aside a space in the home where your loved one can rest if they become overstimulated.
- Avoid decorations that could be hazardous, such as candles, or greenery with berries that might be mistaken for food.
- Talk to guests before the gathering. Explain the changes in your loved one that are caused by the disease. For children, use simple terms and reassurance.

Special considerations for 2020

The holidays will look different this year due to the pandemic, so the adjustments above might be only the beginning. Parades are called off and we probably will not see crowded sales or Santa photos at malls. Many places of worship plan to hold remote or socially distanced services.

Families are making tough decisions. Public health experts say indoor gatherings can spread COVID-19. Should out-of-town family chance plane travel? What about college students coming home without time for the recommended quarantine period? How can they protect the vulnerable oldest family members? Would the weather allow for outdoor gatherings?

Many families are postponing their celebrations, perhaps hoping for a Christmas in July gathering. They're having virtual Hanukkah celebrations with everyone joining in on video. They're sharing old photos and nostalgic recollections among family members. It's not the same as an in-person gathering, but it can be meaningful.

And take heart—some experts say there could be a silver lining, as scaled-back celebrations mean less stress. For people facing economic uncertainty, cutting back on holiday spending will be welcome. And families who have lost a loved one during the pandemic may wish to focus on reflecting as a family on their loved one's life.

If your family will be celebrating online, make sure older loved ones are fully included. Help them set up their electronic devices, and provide training well ahead of time if no one will be nearby to provide tech support. Just as in large gatherings, older adults can feel lost and overlooked in this setting, so make a point of focusing on them. For loved ones with dementia or vision loss, a phone call might be better. Schedule a time for the call when you can give them your undivided attention.

Home care for the holidays

This year the holidays might be more low key for your family—or, the special challenges of 2020 might make things all the more hectic! Professional in-home care can be a real holiday gift for seniors who need care, as well as for family caregivers. Caregivers can provide hygiene care (bathing, dressing, grooming, help going to the toilet), housekeeping and laundry, meal preparation, healthcare reminders, transportation to medical appointments or gatherings, and memory care for clients with dementia. Caregivers can help seniors with online shopping, gift wrapping and decorating, all the while being mindful of social distancing and precautions. A professional caregiver can be with your loved one to allow you time for baking, shopping, decorating—or, this year, setting up the big virtual celebration.

Right at Home care experts work with families to support the needs of senior loved ones and family caregivers alike. Contact us today and ask for a care consultation.

We wish you and your family the happiest of holidays!



For more information, please contact us at
877.697.7537 | www.RightAtHome.net
 6700 Mercy Road, Suite 400 | Omaha NE 68106