



## CARING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

Holidays can be a stressful time of the year, particularly if you are a caregiver. The one thing we know is that this year will be different. But social distancing doesn't have to mean social isolation. We can find new ways to celebrate and connect with each other, and maybe even start a new holiday tradition! If you're worried about this year's holidays, this tip sheet can provide you with strategies to manage expectations, tend to your self-care, and allow you to enjoy the holidays - instead of just surviving them.

### Tips for Caregivers and Families

- **Keep it simple and plan ahead:** You may be physically apart but can get together for chats, activities and meals via the computer. It can help to plan to connect safely together and structure your time over the coming days.
- **Maintain simple traditions:** Family rituals are reassuring and provide a sense of belonging even if they may be different this year. Include the person living with dementia in activities when you can: invite them to stir the cake batter or shape the cookie dough.
- **Engage and connect in ways that work for you.** Do as much or as little as you want: no apologies needed. You can feel connected in a range of ways even when apart. Stay safe by honoring your own needs this year and make time for rest.
- **Save time for reminiscing:** Holiday stories are great for sharing memories. Go through old photographs, get family to call and share their favorite holiday stories.
- **Play favourite songs:** Music is soothing and a great way to connect people. Play a family favourite album at the same time as relatives or friends, and then connect by phone.
- **Ask for help and take turns:** Make plans for friends and family to support the person living with dementia and caregivers, safely in person, or by phone or over the computer.
- **Acknowledge your feelings:** It's okay to feel disappointed about having to pass on traditions you love. This is a really difficult year. Recognize what you're feeling and respond to yourself with kindness and compassion.
- **Prepare family and friends:** Before connecting, let family and friends know of any changes in the condition of the person living with dementia. Helpful tips or suggestions can help reduce anxiety for everyone.
- **Plan shorter, smaller visits:** Keep social time brief for the person living with dementia. For many, the cumulative effect of more noise, people and confusion can be upsetting. Outdoor visits can be short, which may help the person living with dementia.
- **Adjust family meals:** Table talk can be loud and difficult for people living with dementia to follow. A full plate of food may be too much. Using a knife and fork may be too difficult. Go cocktail style and try finger foods for a brief, manageable visit for all.
- **Take care of yourself** - Especially if you are a caregiver. When others offer to help, say "yes!" In-person visits may not be possible, but the offer of a meal, or to run an errand for you may give you the opportunity to recharge your batteries.
- **Reach out** - The Dementia Society is here to help!





## Tips for Family and Friends

- **Be COVID-wise:** Always be sure to check the latest public health guidelines to know what is and what is not advised. <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/novel-coronavirus.aspx>
- **Visiting:** Current public health guidelines are discouraging in-person visits except persons in the same household or essential caregivers. If you are part of a larger family, schedule short calls or video chats in small groups. A holiday schedule of visits over the coming weeks will ensure everyone gets a chance to catch up without being rushed.
- **Plan ahead:** Plan your call or video visits ahead of time to allow the person living with dementia and caregiver to be prepared.
- **Be a good listener:** Be considerate of the phrase “do you remember?” Reminiscing can be based on “I remember when we used to go to...” or “I enjoyed that holiday when we...”, try to use your own memories and share them, rather than asking the person living with dementia to recall.
- **Introduce yourself:** This can help ease the pressure to remember names or recognize voices during a high stress time.
- **Conversation:** Keep the conversation light and pleasant. Conversation may not even be necessary or possible – try going for a walk, reading to the person living with dementia, or just being present.
- **Your interest is appreciated:** People living with dementia and their primary caregivers need to know that their relatives and friends have not forgotten them.
- **Be a good helper:** Ask what you can do to help, offer help, and ask before trying to help.

