

## Hope and Help for the Holidays

Does any of this sound familiar? The holidays are fast approaching, and you're planning a trip home to see your family. The last few times you've talked with your mother, you've noticed that she repeated herself frequently, and you're a little concerned. You asked your dad if he had seen any changes in your mom, and he said she's fine, just getting a little older. You would like to find out what's going on while you're home, but you don't know where to start and how much you can expect to accomplish in a few days.

You should be commended for being concerned. If there is memory loss and confusion to the point that it affects every day living, there is a reason for it. It's **not** a normal part of aging, and, yes, it might be Alzheimer's disease. So, what can you do?

**Observe your mom for early warning signs** – Does she forget recently learned information, has difficulty completing familiar tasks, experiences problems with language, becomes lost or disoriented, uses poor judgment, and exhibits changes in mood and personality? If you recognize several of these warning signs in a loved one, the Alzheimer's Association recommends consulting a physician. **Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other disorders causing dementia is an important step in getting appropriate treatment, care, and support services.**

**If your parents haven't already taken care of it, talk to them about advance directives** – living will, medical power of attorney, and durable power of attorney. For more information about any of these documents or how to approach the subject with family members, contact us at 800-491-2717.

**Call the local Alzheimer's Association chapter.** Learn all you can about this disease, and find out what resources are available.

**Understand that Alzheimer's is a gradually progressing disease.** Focus on your mom's remaining skills and abilities. Enjoy your time together; do things you both like to do, and adapt them, if necessary. Don't dwell on what *was*; direct your attention on what *is*, and make the most of each day together.

**Help your dad accept the changes that are occurring.** His own health and well-being may be dependent on his acceptance of the situation and his willingness to reach out for help when he needs it.

**Realize that you have to take one step at a time.** You can't expect to solve all the issues and problems in one visit. You *can* begin to gather information, develop a plan, and determine who will be responsible for doing what. Don't exclude your parents from this process. Right now, they both probably know what's most important to them. Respect their wishes for as long as possible, to the extent that it is feasible

**Give us a call at 800-491-2717, if you have questions, need information, or could use an understanding person on the other end of the phone.**