

## Holiday tips for dementia caregivers during COVID-19

The holidays are a special time for getting together with family and friends, but due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, these gatherings pose a heightened risk for spreading the virus – especially for older adults. The risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is greater for individuals living with dementia, who tend to be older and have underlying health conditions.

The safest option is to avoid in-person holiday gatherings with people outside of your household — but there are other ways to stay socially connected. Below are ideas for how to safely engage with family and friends during the holidays.

- **Celebrate while physical distancing.**
  - Continue holiday traditions by dropping off favorite baked goods or a care package in a way that avoids close contact, such as leaving the special delivery at the person’s front door.
  - Schedule your own “holiday parade” and ask family members and friends to drive by the older adult’s home with homemade signs or other festive decorations.
  - Plan an outdoor visit with hot chocolate and blankets.
  - Go outside for a walk in the neighborhood to enjoy holiday lights and decorations.
  - Create and send holiday cards.
  - Remember to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and any person who is not a member of your household.
- **Connect through technology.**
  - Use video call software like Zoom or Skype to gather virtually. Since it can be difficult to have conversations with larger groups over video, adding some structure to the call can help. Play a trivia game, sing carols or share pictures from past gatherings.
  - Use video to capture and digitally send special moments, such as children opening gifts.
  - Plan a video call to cook or bake a special recipe together.
  - Record and send a “video holiday card” that includes personalized messages.
  - Schedule a time to watch a favorite holiday movie together from separate homes. Text or video chat while you watch.
  - If your loved one struggles with technology, ask a primary caregiver — or staff in an assisted living facility — if they can help facilitate a

video call. If that's not possible, connecting with a simple phone call goes a long way toward feeling together on the holidays.

- Cross talk or simultaneous conversations can be challenging for people living with dementia, so consider this when planning.

If you choose to include older adults in an in-person holiday gathering, it is critical to weigh the risks to their health. Even when precautions are taken, close contact with anyone outside of your household increases the risk of spreading COVID-19. Please consider the following if you choose to include older adults in a face-to-face gathering:

- Do not attend or host a gathering if you have been (or think you have been) exposed to COVID-19.
- Ask attendees to avoid or strictly limit contact with others for 14 days prior to your gathering.
- Host the event outside, if possible.
- Ask attendees to wash or sanitize their hands regularly, wear masks and maintain 6 feet of distance between one another.
- Shorten the duration of the event or limit the amount of time older adults will be in attendance.
- Avoid hugging, handshakes and close contact of any kind.
- Limit the number of people at the event.
- Encourage guests to bring food and drinks for themselves and members of their household only. If food will be served to all attendees, avoid buffet and family-style meals in which many people handle serving dishes and utensils. Instead, designate one person to plate dinner. Also, consider creative seating options that will help guests practice physical distancing.
- Consider the levels of COVID-19 transmission in the community where the event is being held. Also, keep in mind that travel increases the likelihood of spreading or contracting COVID-19, so consider this when inviting guests who live far away or in areas with high rates of transmission.

Additional considerations:

- When making holiday plans, consider what will be most comfortable and enjoyable for the person living with dementia. Sticking to his or her normal routine as much as possible will help keep the celebrations from becoming disruptive or confusing.
- Take care of yourself. The current COVID-19 crisis is creating challenges that can feel overwhelming for many families impacted by dementia. It's more important than ever to take care of your physical, mental and emotional well-being.

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