



# Caregiver Fact Sheet

## Reducing Stress during Holiday or Other Gatherings

Gatherings—during the holidays or any time of the year—can be stressful for caregivers and their care partners living with dementia. There are things you can do to make them more enjoyable for everyone:

- If you host any gatherings:
  - o Limit the amount of guests, and invite those who understand your situation and whom your care partner enjoy seeing.
  - o Don't take on too much responsibility for cooking and decorating. Keep the menu simple and consider a potluck.
  - o Consider a shorter gathering, with a set beginning and ending time.
  - o Reduce background noise, which can be confusing and upsetting to people living with dementia.
  - o Don't invite young children if your care partner gets upset by things like yelling, running around, or babies crying. People living with dementia can get upset by too much activity or noise.
  - o Dim bright lights and avoid flashing or twinkling lights.
  - o Involve your care partner in the planning, if he or she can participate. For example, ask, "Should we use the red tablecloth or the white one?"
  - o Ask for your care partner's help with things he or she can do, like decorating, setting the table, or sweeping the floor.
  - o Have a place where your care partner can get away for a little while if there's too much activity.
  - o Music is magic! People living with dementia tend to remember music better than words. Consider having a sing-along.
  - o Have old photos on hand to reminisce with friends and family.
- If you plan on going someplace for an event or activity, be prepared to leave early if it's too much for your care partner to handle.
- Give your care partner a choice between two available options. For example, ask, "Would you like turkey or ham?" Giving a simple choice is better than asking, "What would you like to eat?"
- If the people you'll see at gatherings are not sure how to interact with your care partner, prepare them with this information:
  - o Avoid testing your care partner's memory by asking questions like, "Do you remember me?" "Do you remember when. . . ?"
  - o Be patient if your care partner asks the same question more than once or repeats a story.
  - o Do not correct your care partner if he or she makes a mistake and mis-remember things or people.
  - o Don't take things your care partner may say or do personally.

Be flexible! We can get caught up in maintaining our traditions because we've always done things a certain way. Adapting the experience to meet your care partner's needs will make for a less stressful and more meaningful holiday season.

*This fact sheet was created by Isabel Maria, a Dementia Resource Specialist with the North Central Texas Area Agency on Aging.*

