**Reducing Holiday Stress**

It’s time for the holidays once again; decorating, shopping, parties, family gatherings, presents, greeting cards…and the list goes on and on. While many people look forward to the hustle and bustle of the season, others see the holidays as a time of stress, chaos and sadness.

People who have experienced changes due to Alzheimer’s, stroke or other medical conditions may feel a great deal of loss during the holidays. Those who are caring for these loved ones may feel overwhelmed by trying to keep up holiday traditions while continuing to provide care. They may also be uncertain about gathering with friends and family for fear the changes in physical health, behavior and personality may make others uncomfortable.

If you are experiencing anxiety over the upcoming holiday season it is important to realize that these feelings are normal, and you are not alone. There are ways to reduce stress during the holiday season. Please take a moment to contemplate what you can do to better manage your life during this busy season.

* **Adjust your expectations**. You don’t have to do everything you’ve done in the past. Talk with your loved ones and choose a few traditions to carry out.
* **Ask for help.** Involve other family members or friends in your holiday preparations. Not only does this reduce your stress, but it provides you and your loved one with socialization. Write down what needs to be done so you can ask for something specific when people offer to help.
* **Prepare family and friends before getting together**. Update family and friends on how your loved one has changed and what they can expect during their visit. Offer suggestions on how best to communicate.
* **Suggest gift ideas**. Give friends and family ideas of useful gifts they can give such as cd’s, photo albums, comfortable clothing, videos or audio books. Don’t forget your own wish list, too! Gift certificates for dining, laundry or cleaning services are great ideas for busy caregivers.
* **Keep the needs of your loved one in mind**. For those with memory loss, remember that distant memory stays intact the longest and plan activities accordingly, avoiding new games or activities. Many stroke survivors have lost the ability to feed themselves and may find it uncomfortable to eat in front of guests. An afternoon of looking at old slides or photos and reminiscing might be more appropriate than sharing a meal. Schedule gatherings during the day rather than in the evening since symptoms often are worse in the evening.
* **Be good to yourself**. Make it a priority to care for yourself. Getting away with friends for lunch, a movie or a concert might be just what you need. Or perhaps some time by yourself to read, write in a journal or enjoy a bubble bath is how you recharge. Determine what rejuvenates you and take the time to do it.

Don’t let the hustle and bustle of the holidays add anxiety to your life! Find ways to simplify and enjoy a stress-free holiday season filled with love, joy and good memories! For more information about caregiving and resource that can help, contact <your contact info here>. Happy Holidays!

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