

## **Navigating Social Gatherings with Dementia**

While social events or the holidays are a time for celebration, they will also present stresses: for caregivers as they balance responsibilities and for those living with dementia as they face breaks in habit and increased stimulation. Here are some tips to manage:

### **1. Adjust Expectations**

- Be aware of what you can handle: whether that's how many people you invite over, the time you spend visiting others, or limiting the number of gatherings you attend.
- This might mean giving up a tradition, like being the one to cook dinner... it may be difficult to let go, but try to think of it as a chance for someone else to start their tradition.
- Maintain the person living with dementia's routine as much as possible to avoid overwhelming them, and consider holding gatherings earlier in the day to avoid the symptoms of sundowning.

### **2. Make use of Technology**

- Use a video call or even a regular phone call to connect with someone whom you cannot visit in-person, during which you can share some of your family traditions from a distance, such as cooking, watching a movie or singing songs.
- Gathering virtually on Zoom, Skype or FaceTime can allow you to implement your limits on time spent or number of people you interact with.
- Remember not to invite too many people to a group or shared call, as cross-talking can be confusing and difficult for a person living with dementia.

### **3. Familiarize Others**

- In the early stages of dementia, relatives and friends may not notice the changes in a person, while in middle to later stages, changes may progress faster. Prepare visitors ahead of time as to what changes they should expect to see, or how they should adapt.

### **4. Involve the person living with dementia**

- Involve the person in safe, manageable preparation activities that he or she enjoys.
- Ask them to help you prepare food, wrap packages, help decorate or set the table.
- Focus on the things that bring happiness and let go of activities that seem overwhelming, stressful or too risky. Taking on too many tasks can wear on both of you.
- Build on traditions and memories and experiment with new traditions that might be less stressful or a better fit with your caregiving responsibilities, such as watching seasonal movies.