



The Holiday Edition

Planning for the holidays brings a mix of excitement, joy and stress. Caring for someone with a dementia can add additional stress as caregivers juggle holiday celebrations with family and friends while avoiding excess fatigue and overstimulation. The secret to successful holidays is to keep them simple. Many family members feel that elaborate preparations, large crowds and multiple generations make for great memories. However, the person with dementia will probably enjoy simpler dinners and gatherings. Here are some basic ingredients to create a more successful celebration:

Before Dinner

Make sure the person is well-rested throughout the day and *especially before* the holiday dinner. Since fatigue can occur in 90 minutes or less, the person may do better attending only the meal, rather than the entire day. You may consider serving dinner earlier in the day to avoid fatigue. It is also a good idea to have a place (such as a guest room) where the person can go to rest or get some quiet from a loud or large group.

Allow the person who has prepared the elaborate dinner in the past to help with minor preparations such as peeling, mixing or mashing. But, don't expect the person to be responsible for an entire complex recipe such as the traditional stuffing recipe.

Be aware that people with dementia are highly susceptible to heightened stimuli, especially groups and noise. Make sure the person with dementia is NOT seated at the "children's table." Limit the amount of time the person is seated in a room of avid football fans and a loud TV as this will overwhelm the person and produce fatigue.

During Dinner

If the person asks to leave early, take him or her home or to a place to rest. Do not try to delay the person's exit as it may cause significant problems with confusion or agitation for up to 36 hours.

Avoid alcohol intake, especially if the person is on a mood-modifying medication. Up to four ounces of wine for a toast may not do any harm, however more than that is discouraged.

Prepare family and friends to accept what the person with dementia says or perceives and not to argue or correct. Attempts to clarify "mistaken memories" will only serve to produce anxiety, worry or anger. It is best to accept what the person says and move on. Talking about family and reminiscing can be very meaningful for the person. Arguing at the dinner table is strongly discouraged.

After Dinner

If family members are coming from out-of-town do NOT have them stay at the person's home as often the person feels they must "play host."

Celebrating the holiday with a person with dementia can be fun and meaningful, despite the extra work — you have the opportunity to create a pleasant experience for the person and for yourself.

Holiday Gift Ideas

For the person with dementia:

- The gift of time – make a plans for a one-on-one visit/activity
- Comfortable slippers
- Warm sweater/sweatshirt
- Soft blanket/afghan
- Recliner chair
- Scented lotion
- Customized CD of favorite music
- CD player
- DVD/VHS favorite old movies/TV shows
- Picture books of favorite sights/activities
- Photo albums of family/friends
- Tickets to an Arts Engagement Program
- Medic Alert/Safe Return jewelry

For the caregiver:

- Pampering gifts such as:
 - Massage
 - Manicure
 - Pedicure
 - Facial
- The gift of time:
 - Plan a respite for the caregiver
- Respite gift certificates for:
 - In-home respite care
 - Adult day health care
 - Housekeeping
 - Lawn care
- Prepared food/food baskets
- Restaurant gift cards
- DVRs (to record the shows they are missing)



“Ask the Expert”

Jan Dougherty, RN, MS

Dear Jan,

I am a worried daughter whose mom lives in another state. Mom has memory loss and is becoming rude and aggressive. I don't want to put her through a diagnostic evaluation and risk embarrassing or angering Mom, but she is 86; what do you expect?

My problem? A person from the local funeral home has taken Mom “under her wing” and provides transportation (for a fee, of course); has become her buddy; has her going to a new doctor (the funeral worker's brother): and accompanies her everywhere. Sounds nice, right? Well, it did until the funeral employee took Mom to see her (the funeral worker's) daughter — the attorney. The funeral director is now Mom's sole beneficiary and DPOA. What does this mean?

I don't want to make waves because it is a small rural town. I don't want to hurt Mom's feelings, yet I find the funeral worker intimidating. How can I get my mom to love me again and assure she has care she might need. Signed: "Likes Peace"

Dear “Peace,”

This is such a common occurrence and an extremely serious one! People who live alone are very vulnerable to people who befriend them, but befriending a person with memory loss for personal gain is exploitation and is illegal in most states. If the funeral worker had your mom's best interest at heart she would work with you instead of using intimidation. A care worker should never get the person a new doctor and NEVER take her to an attorney to change decision-makers without the family being fully informed. You may not be able to do anything about this, but I would recommend the following: Call the funeral director and report what you

told me.

1. Call the police and report what has happened.

2. You need an elder law attorney to help you. This is the time make waves. Your mother may end up with no care and no money. You may need to file for an emergency guardianship.

3. Write down every memory problem and behavioral issue you see or is reported to you by neighbors and give it to your elder law attorney.

4. Make an appointment to have Mom diagnosed. While this is not pleasant, it is the only way you have of proving that Mom lacked capacity to understand the implications of what she was signing.

5. It may be time to consider moving Mom to a protected environment nearer to you or an involved sibling, but first you have to pursue all legal options.

6. Adult children out-of-state (or even in state) must be continually vigilant about people who will exploit your beloved parent. People with even mild memory loss are particularly vulnerable to people who tell them they love them and then turn family against them. "Your daughter is no good -- just wants your money and to throw you in a nursing home. I will protect you -- just sign this form"

My heart goes out to you; caring for a loved one with dementia is never easy. When you add paranoia and behavioral issues to the memory loss, it is especially difficult, however trying to ignore the problems only makes them worse. Your mom's problems would be far easier to manage if you work with a dementia team or provider who can give you ongoing advice, strategies and medications to lessen the symptoms.

What's New

Consider supporting the nonprofit mission of Banner Alzheimer's Institute by making a tax-deductible year-end gift or through a bequest in your will. A bequest can be in the form of cash or securities. For details, visit www.banneralz.org or call (602) 839-3851.

Beacon Bits

FINDING Help Class - A 90-minute class to help caregivers to understand the importance of planning ahead with legal, financial and making medical decisions for people with Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias. This class is being offered on Nov. 17 from 4 p.m.—5:30 p.m. at Banner Alzheimer's Institute in the 3rd Floor Conference Room.

COMPASS Class - A 90-minute class to help caregivers understand the disease and related dementias. Attendees will learn about disease progression, treatment and tips on how to live with it from day-to-day. This class is being offered on Nov. 23 from 4 p.m.—5:30 p.m. at Banner Alzheimer's Institute in the 3rd Floor Conference Room.

Registration is required for classes. Both classes will be held at 901 E. Willetta Street in Phoenix. To register, contact Veronica Ellis at (602) 839-6850 or veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com.

A Free Memory Screening Event is being held on Friday, December 4 in collaboration with the Devonshire Senior Center located at 2802 E. Devonshire Ave. in Phoenix. The screening will be offered from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. and take approximately 15-20 minutes. For more information, contact Veronica Ellis at (602) 839-6850 or veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com.

Our phone prefix is changing to “839”

Start dialing now. Banner Alzheimer's Institute has changed its phone prefix. Our new prefix is “839.” Please note that the old “239” prefix, will no longer work beginning Jan. 1, 2010. The new prefix also applies to the Memory Disorder Clinic; (602) 839-6900.

Our Mission

To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families, and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of Banner Alzheimer's Foundation.