Coping With Visitors and Alzheimer’s

by BRENDA VANTA

Coping With Visitors

It's holiday season, and a great time to re-connect with family and friends. If you are the caregiver or close relative carrying for a loved one with Alzheimer’s, you will need to plan more this holiday and take extra care, so you can all enjoy the holiday season as much as possible.

Hosting a Family Get-Together

You may have lots of relatives and friends, but a big party can be too overwhelming for you, and for a person with Alzheimer's. The best thing to do is to keep the number of guests to a minimum, and if you can’t, to organize the party in two rooms. Your loved one with Alzheimer's should stay in a quiet room, where he can be visited by one or two persons at a time, and rest as needed.

Keep the party simple – you can order some already prepared food, or you can ask other family members to help you prepare it. Spending hours shopping and cooking can drain you of energy, and leave a person with Alzheimer's more agitated and without supervision. Keep the menu simple, without highly processed foods (with too much fat or sugar), and very little alcohol or coffee available for the Alzheimer's sufferer.

Don’t change the environment too much - Your relative with Alzheimer's has troubles remembering a lot of things, and his memory troubles could aggravate if the home looks different. A Christmas tree with a few lights and ornaments, and few candles is all you need to feel the holiday, and will save your energy, too. Avoid loud music, strong fragrances, bright lights or anything else that could upset or over-stimulate the person you are taking care of.

Maintain a routine - including the time when he takes medication, exercises, eats, or goes to bed. In addition, you can show him a photo album, including photos with the guests. A photo album and calling the guests a few days before the party can help the person with Alzheimer's prepare for seeing his relatives. This way it may be easier to remember them when they come to the party. A calendar and a clock should always be handy, so he will be oriented in time.

Avoid awkward situations - Maybe some of your guests haven’t been in your home since your relative was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, or maybe the situation is worse since last year. Explain your guests about any changes in behavior, the fact they may not be recognized, or “accidents” such as incontinence, eating with fingers, or make inappropriate comments. It is important to treat the Alzheimer's sufferer as normal as possible, with patience and kindness. Explain to guests that the party will be simple and short, to avoid stress and over stimulation.

Don’t forget to take care of yourself, too. Get some help after the party - either a family member or a paid support worker could come clean the house, and provide company for your relative, while you relax and rest.