



## How to Celebrate Mother's Day when Mom has Alzheimer's

Celebrating holidays can be a challenge for families who have a loved one with Alzheimer's. Past traditions often need to give way to new realities. On Mother's Day, many adult children wonder how to celebrate a day that may no longer hold any meaning for the honoree. But regardless of your mother's particular circumstances, most all mothers enjoy spending time with someone who appreciates and pays attention to them. We all have a need for human connection and simply having you near is something she'll appreciate. Here are some ways to ensure that celebrating your Mom will be an enjoyable time for both of you:

**Sharing a Meal.** Taking Mom out on Mother's Day is a tradition as old as the day itself. The original idea behind it was to give Mom a day off from cooking – an idea that may no longer hold much meaning if your Mom lives in a memory care community or has her meals made for her each day. But if eating is something your mother still enjoys, consider making some of her favorite dishes and taking them to her. You can even reminisce about favorite foods and the memories you share surrounding special meals. People with dementia typically like a routine. If you do share a meal together, do so at a time when she usually eats, preferably in familiar surroundings. If you do decide to go out, make sure she is comfortable with crowds and does well in a different setting than what she's used to. If she's amenable to the idea, consider ordering for her. And if your mom lives



in a senior care facility, check with the staff—they may hold a special Mother's Day celebration where you and other family members can join Mom.

**Creating a Memorable Day.** Conversations can sometimes be difficult with someone living with dementia, which often presents a challenge on how to create a special moment. Because many people with dementia still have their long-term memories intact, reminiscing about a past you share is a good way to connect. Consider taking a photo album of a past trip you've taken together or some childhood events. Enter her world and share her reality. If she doesn't know who you are, but has memories of you, invite her to share those memories. If conversations are challenging, try to find an activity that the two of you can do together and be successful

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# Protect Your Brain by Controlling High Blood Pressure

May is National High Blood Pressure Education Month



**W**hy do older adults experience memory and thinking problems? Not so long ago, these symptoms were largely lumped together under the heading of “Alzheimer’s disease.” But today’s research, including increasingly sophisticated brain imaging techniques, shows that the picture is more complicated.

Recent research released by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) confirms that the symptoms of dementia most likely stem from a combination of different brain ailments — including Alzheimer’s disease, but also including Lewy bodies, hippocampal sclerosis, microinfarcts (small strokes) and low brain weight. And the more of these conditions a person has, the more likely they are to suffer memory and thinking problems. The VA research team, headed by Dr. Lon White, noted of his study, “It was combinations of ailments — rather than any single condition — that correlated most strongly with cognitive impairment. Such combinations had a dramatic impact on dementia risk.”

Dr. White says more research is needed on how to protect against these various brain conditions — but one thing experts know for sure is that high blood pressure raises the risk of all of them. Said Dr. White, “At this point, prevention by effective treatment of hypertension in midlife seems to be the only solid approach.”

Protecting against dementia isn’t the only incentive to keep our blood pressure under control. High blood pressure (hypertension) raises the risk of stroke and heart

attack, contributing to more than 1,000 deaths in America each day. Yet although one-third of American adults have high blood pressure—and the percentage is much higher in older adults — many are totally unaware of it. Hypertension is often called “the silent killer,” because these patients don’t discover that anything is amiss until damage is done.

For May’s National High Blood Pressure Education Month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides answers to common questions people have about controlling their blood pressure:

## **Q: What is high blood pressure?**

**A:** Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of arteries. This pressure naturally rises and falls during the day, but when it is consistently too high, it is considered high blood pressure. Like the pipes in your house, your arteries can fail if they are under too much pressure.

## **Q: When my healthcare provider takes my blood pressure, what do the numbers mean?**

**A:** Blood pressure has two numbers, systolic and diastolic, and is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg). Systolic pressure (the top number) is the force on the blood vessel walls when the heart beats and pumps blood out of the heart. Diastolic pressure (the bottom number) is the force that occurs when the heart relaxes in between beats.

## **Q: What numbers are considered healthy?**

**A:** If your blood pressure is less than 120 systolic and less than 80 diastolic, then your blood pressure is normal; between 120 and 139 systolic and 80 – 89 diastolic, you have prehypertension. Systolic of 140 or greater, or diastolic that is 90 or greater, is hypertension.

## **Q: If my blood pressure is too high, what can I do?**

**A:** Your doctor can help you get your blood pressure under control by prescribing certain medications, helping you make healthy lifestyle changes, and helping you

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# Aging and Caregiving in the News

Information, updates and interesting tidbits from across the country and around the world.

## In this issue:

- Will seniors accept care from a robot?
- Giving advice is healthy for older adults

### Online:

- Sobering statistics about finances of Alzheimer's caregivers

## "R2D2, Bring Me My Reading Glasses!"

Science fiction fans might enjoy this study from Penn State's Media Effects Research Laboratory. There's been quite a bit of coverage about the present and future use of robotic technology to supplement human care for seniors living at home and in senior living facilities. Researcher S. Shyam Sundar says, "Robots could provide everything from simple reminders — when to take pills, for example — to fetching water and food for people with limited mobility." Yet many older adults have expressed distaste for having an electronic gadget take the place of a human caregiver. Wondering how to overcome resistance to robotic assistance, Sundar and his team discovered that seniors were more open to the idea of robotic devices when they were familiar with fictitious robots — not only helpful, gentle ones like C3PO, WALL-E or Robby from Lost



in Space, but even the more intimidating ones, such as the Terminator. Sundar hopes that this familiarity will be inspiring; he says, "It seems like the more media portrayals they can recall, the more likely their attitudes would be positive toward robots, rather than negative."

## "When I Was Your Age..."

We know that in our later years, having a sense of purpose and the feeling that we matter in the world promotes both emotional and physical health. The American Sociological Association recently reported that seniors who have opportunities to give advice and mentor younger people see their lives as highly meaningful. Yet, said study author Markus H. Schafer of the University of Toronto, "Just when giving advice seems to be the most important, opportunities for doing so seem to wane. Older adults occupy fewer social roles, are less socially active, and interact with a more restricted range of people. So, while the average 65-year-old may well have more wisdom than the average 30-year-old, demographic and social structure factors seem to provide the latter with more opportunity for actually dispensing advice." Schafer suggests that our communities create more opportunities for older adults to share their valuable wisdom and life experiences. He suggests, "Schools, churches, civic organizations, and other community groups could consider how to facilitate intergenerational mentorship experiences and to creatively enable more older adults to be advice-givers."

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## Blood Pressure *from page 2*

monitor your blood pressure regularly.

### Q: What lifestyle changes can lower blood pressure?

A: The big two are to quit smoking and to reduce sodium in your diet. The CDC also recommends that people manage their stress, maintain a healthy weight, and eat a healthy diet that is high in fruits and vegetables, and low in not only sodium but also in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol. Limit alcohol to two drinks per day

for men and one for women.

### Q: Where can I learn more?

A: The CDC offers a collection of resources ([www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/index.htm)) to help consumers learn more about hypertension and to help them keep their blood pressure at a healthy level.

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Willow Ridge Healthcare  
400 Deronda Street  
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Riverbend Senior Living  
475 Golfview Lane  
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(715) 268-9949

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at, such as doing a simple jigsaw puzzle, reading a story or listening to music. If you bring grandchildren or other young family members along and they haven't seen Mom in a while, prepare them ahead of time for the changes their beloved elder is experiencing.

**Gifts.** Everyone enjoys receiving gifts, and this may be a natural segue into reminiscing about some of your mom's favorite presents from the past. Good gifts are those that stimulate the senses, such as a soft blanket, scented lotions, a CD of her favorite music, or a photo of the two of you together. Or you may consider taking some fresh cut flowers that the two of you can arrange in a vase together. Ask memory care facility staff for some suggestions if you can't think of a gift that would be appropriate and appreciated.

**Celebrate the Relationship You Have Now.** While seeing someone you've loved all your life slowly slip away from you is understandably traumatic, try to acknowledge that the person who does exist is still a lovable human being in need of compassion. If your mom does something that irritates you, imagine how the woman you knew 20 years ago would feel knowing what is happening to her. Recognize that whatever its form, you still have a relationship and that it deserves to be nurtured just like any other relationship. This may be the most important Mother's Day yet for both of you.

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