



Creating a Happy Holiday for Someone Living in a Skilled Nursing Facility

The holidays are a joyous time of the year, but they can also come with added stress. Shopping, getting ready for traveling, or welcoming visitors can seem overwhelming during what is usually a busy time of year. And if you have a loved one living in a nursing home, trying to include them into your holiday plans can become challenging with all you have on your plate.

But including them is particularly important during this time of year. They may be feeling sad about their health condition—and now, they may feel a loss of beloved traditions and miss being around family and friends. Here are some tips to make this holiday one that you and your loved one will remember forever.

Let go of expectations

Accept the fact that normal traditions may need some adjusting and that you can still have a wonderful holiday. The emphasis is on enjoying simply being together. Make the time you do spend together festive and fun. Let friends and other relatives know that you may be cutting back on certain activities in order to help ensure your loved one has an enjoyable holiday.

Visit often

The best gift always is spending time with your loved one. Pick a day and put up some holiday decorations while playing holiday music. Take some favorite holiday cookies and some hot cider or hot chocolate (check with nursing staff first). Talk about cherished memories of past holidays and encourage your loved



one to share their favorite holiday stories. Bring along the grandkids and have a little gift exchange.

Take part in the facility's activities

Most skilled nursing facilities have a lot going on during the holidays – guest carolers and choirs, special meals and celebrations, and volunteers stopping by to spread lots of holiday joy. Join your loved one in one or more of these events and encourage them to take part in all that their facility has to offer.

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Focus on Vision During National Diabetes Month

This November, learn about ways people with diabetes can protect their sight. Here is some important information from the National Eye Institute, one of the National Institutes of Health.



You can't feel it. You can't see it — until it's too late. Diabetic retinopathy, the most common form of diabetic eye disease, is the leading cause of blindness in adults age 20 – 74. It occurs when diabetes damages blood vessels in the retina. Diabetic retinopathy affects 7.7 million Americans, and that number is projected to increase to more than 14.6 million people by 2030.

The longer a person has diabetes, the greater the risk for diabetic eye disease. Once vision is lost, it often cannot be restored. So people with diabetes should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year to help protect their sight.

Keeping diabetes in control is key to slowing the progression of vision complications like diabetic retinopathy. There are important steps people with diabetes can take to keep their health on **TRACK**:

Take your medications as prescribed by your doctor.

Reach and maintain a healthy weight.

Add physical activity to your daily routine.

Control your ABCs — A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels.

Kick the smoking habit.

Early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care can reduce a person's risk for severe vision loss from diabetic eye disease by 95 percent. Dr. Paul Sieving, director of the National Eye Institute (NEI), says, "Only about half of all people with diabetes get an annual comprehensive dilated eye exam, which is essential for detecting diabetic eye disease early, when it is most treatable. Newer and better treatments are available for the first time in decades, making early detection even more important."

With no early symptoms, diabetic eye disease — a group of conditions including cataract, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy—can affect anyone with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. African Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and Hispanics/Latinos are at higher risk for losing vision or going blind from diabetes.

"More than ever, it's important for people with diabetes to have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year," says Dr. Suber Huang, chair of the Diabetic Eye Disease Subcommittee for NEI's National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP) and member of the NEI-funded Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research Network. "New treatments are being developed all the time, and we are learning that different treatments may work best for different patients. What hasn't changed is that early treatment is always better. There has never been a more hopeful time in the treatment of diabetic retinopathy."

Remember — if you have diabetes, make annual comprehensive dilated eye exams part of your self-management routine. Don't wait until you notice an eye problem to have an exam. Living with diabetes can be challenging, but you don't have to lose your vision or go blind because of it.

Source: The National Eye Institute (NEI), one of the 27 National Institutes of Health. For more information on diabetic eye disease, tips on finding an eye care professional, or information on financial assistance, visit the NEI website (<https://www.nei.nih.gov/diabetes>) or call NEI at 301-496-5248.

Aging & Caregiving in the News

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

In this issue:

- Why coffee drinkers live longer
- Could worrying about our memory be a self-fulfilling prophecy?
- Avoiding a “holiday heart attack”



Another Great Reason to Take a Coffee Break

Data show that coffee drinkers seem to live longer. But why? The answer may lie in the effect of caffeine on the inflammation process. According to Stanford professor David Furman, Ph.D., “More than 90 percent of all noncommunicable diseases of aging are associated with chronic inflammation.” These diseases include many cancers, Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis and even depression. Furman said, “It’s well-known that caffeine intake is associated with longevity. Many studies have shown this association. We’ve found a possible reason for why this may be so.” Furman and his team performed laboratory studies showing that caffeine lessens the effects of certain dangerous substances that are part of the inflammation process. Said co-author Mark Davis, “That something many people drink — and actually like to drink — might have a direct benefit come as a surprise to us.”

Could Worrying About Our Memory Harm Our Memory?

Neurologists know quite a bit about risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease, such as diabetes, smoking, obesity, and certain genetic factors. Now, a research team from Penn State University is investigating whether simply be-

lieving we’re having trouble with our memory can lead to real memory loss. According to the research team, led by professor Nikki Hill, “Over 20 percent of older adults suffer from subjective memory impairment, where a person reports having trouble remembering things with no evidence of actual memory loss.” These seniors may be especially worried if they have a family history of dementia. This erroneous belief can cause anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from social activities — which, in turn, truly do raise the risk of Alzheimer’s disease! Said Hill, “Alzheimer’s is a slowly progressing disease; often by the time it is diagnosed, it is already having a substantial impact on a patient’s daily life. The hope is that early interventions will help delay or prevent the symptoms that are so devastating to patients and their families.”

An Unwanted Holiday Gift

Why do heart-related deaths in the U.S. increase around the winter holidays? Could cold weather be the culprit, as some experts have speculated? To better understand the factors involved, researchers from New Zealand examined the data in their own country, and discovered that even though they celebrate those holidays during the warmest months, there is still a slight increase of heart attacks over the holidays. Why? The research, published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, speculated that over the holidays, people consume more food and alcohol. Hospitals and medical facilities may be understaffed. People who would ordinarily seek help for troubling symptoms might not do so during the holidays — maybe they’re too busy, or perhaps they’re visiting relatives out of town, and decide to wait until they get home. The most likely top factor is increased stress. During the holidays we can be so busy, and dealing with family dynamics can certainly raise our stress level. So give yourself a truly valuable holiday gift: Lower your stress, and be alert to signs from your body that something’s not right. Visit the American Heart Association website to find more tips for avoiding holiday heart attacks (<https://newsroom.heart.org/news/avoiding-the-deadly-holiday-heart-attack>).

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Creating a Happy Holiday *from page 1*

Bring your loved home for the day

If your loved one is able to leave the facility for a day safely, consider including them in the Big Day. Consult with staff ahead of time to see if this is feasible. You'll also need to ensure your home is a safe environment for your loved one and they will be comfortable while visiting.

Give appropriately

Giving gifts is often one of the most enjoyable parts of the holiday season. But choosing the perfect present for someone who lives in a nursing home can seem like a challenge. Try to make your gift one that's personal, like framed photos of the grandkids or a preloaded iPod with some of their favorite songs. Special soaps, shampoos and lotions can make your loved one feel special. Stuffed animals might be appropriate, something that your loved one can cherish without having the responsibility of a live pet. If you live far away and spend most of your time with your

loved one on the phone, give them a prepaid phone card, so they can call you anytime.

Take care of yourself

Holidays are a challenge and caregivers can easily burn out during this time of year. Allow yourself to enjoy the season and spend time with family and friends, taking part in the festivities that are a big part of the holidays. Continue your healthcare regimen, which may include exercising, going to the doctor, or meditating. Being a good caregiver means taking care of yourself – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

With a little planning and a few adjustments, celebrating the holidays with a loved one who lives in a skilled nursing facility can be a joyous time – for both you and your loved one.

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