

Sweet summertime: tips for helping your loved one living with dementia enjoy the season!

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Routine is a best friend to a person living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. Because of the way dementia affects the brain, establishing a good routine and schedule helps a person function more independently and better throughout the day. So what happens when all of our favorite things about summer – picnics, family gatherings, etc. – throw off this routine? Below are a couple of tips to help make sure these summertime favorites go off without a hitch.

Routine, routine, routine

Can I say enough about the importance of routine? Truly, this is the #1 rule for my clients living with a progressive dementia. Having a good daily schedule built around regular waking/sleeping times, meal times, medication times, and activity is critical. When you have a gathering scheduled, if you're able to, try to plan it around your loved one's best time of day. Or, if you don't have much say on planning, modify how long you and your loved one need to be there. For example, stay for the meal, socialize a bit, and then head home to give your loved one their usual afternoon break. Don't feel like you have to be rigid in your schedule, but just keep it in mind when planning an outing with your loved one.

In addition to routine, having 'quiet time' is beneficial.

In a normal day, we usually have some time by ourselves to relax. Picnics and family gatherings are usually not filled with 'quiet time' and instead with laughs and time with loved ones. Although these are welcome, a person living with Alzheimer's really does need their time to recharge and be out of the hustle and bustle. Enlist the help of some family members who can take the lead in recognizing when some quiet time is necessary.

Be flexible and patient.

I've often referred to Alzheimer's disease/dementia as a planner's worst nightmare. I love to have neatly planned schedules and to-do lists for the day. Unfortunately, with the unpredictability of dementia symptoms, it's hard to know how each day will go. You might have traditions or activities that you typically do during the summer, which can often be painful reminders of the decline due to dementia. Try modifying activities to still include your loved one, but making it manageable for them to enjoy with you.

Enlist some support for yourself!

Summertime gatherings can be a little chaotic at times (think booming fireworks!). Having a friend or family member come along for the day can make your day more enjoyable as you know there is another person to help support your loved one. Summertime picnics and gatherings might look a little different now with dementia added to the mix, but that doesn't mean that you and your loved one can still enjoy all this season has to offer.

Amy Sobrino practices as a geriatric social worker and co-founded Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness. For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nobsch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.