



Aging Wisely With Linda

Consultations/Consulting • Counseling/Coaching
Expert on Dementia • Speaking/Teaching

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Making Holiday Visits Successful

It's that wonderful time of the year again, with a lot of family celebrations. But like last year, Covid-19 is on the rise once more. This month we'll focus on how to make holiday visits successful, whether you're going across town or across the country.

First, let's assume everyone who is visiting is fully vaccinated and had a negative rapid Covid-19 test the day of the visit. If this is not the case, you can read our recommendations listed under our resources section. For visits that involve those over the age of 80 or children under the age of 5 who can't be vaccinated, there are ways to limit exposure to the virus, resulting in safer visits. These options include staying outdoors and wearing masks, video calls, sending handmade cards, or even playing a game over Zoom.



In some families, this year's holiday gatherings might be the first time they have come together since the Covid-19 pandemic started. These long-awaited reunions can feel so special and bring everyone to tears. But keep in mind that many individuals with dementia have failed greatly due to the lack of socialization, so be prepared for changes you might not have expected. I already am hearing from families that loved ones with dementia are more confused this year regarding who people are. They are forgetting names of children or in-laws or looking for relatives long passed.

To make your holiday gathering as successful as possible, consider limiting the length of the gathering for older individuals with dementia. This is easier for those who are local than those who are visiting from out of town. These limited gatherings are especially helpful if there are a lot of young children and a lot of noise. Increased anxiety from commotion can bring on other hard-to-manage behaviors that you may not have seen before. You can limit your visit by picking up your elderly loved ones close to the time of the meal and returning them to their homes after dessert.



Sometimes your older family members like to prepare food. This is a great way to make them feel good about themselves and feel they are contributing to the festivities. You can invite them to come early and watch them while they prepare the food. Or, if cooking is not safe for them, you can have them do most of the mixing. Another option is to have a candle-lighting tradition and save it for this person to perform.

If you have an older family member who has not been diagnosed with dementia, but you are starting to see changes that cause you to want to discuss options for supportive living, do not do this at a holiday gathering. Although it's tempting because everyone is together, it's best to wait a day or week later because you want this issue to be your only focus. When you do start this conversation, you will want to be respectful with your observations and suggestions. It is not the time for "should," but rather, "I am concerned about x."

Visit our resources to find an organization that can assist you with this challenging process, and register for our January class, “Dementia: Understanding Options for Home Care and Memory Care.”

The best way for a successful holiday celebration is to keep it simple, reduce expectations and stress, limit the time your older loved ones are with the entire family, and ensure safety for everyone.

Being a caregiver to aging parents brings with it many questions all year long. My new book, *The Empowered Caregiver*, provides an abundance of practical tips to help adult children through this journey. You can find it now on [Amazon](#).



Affirmation: “Simplicity is the Key to Family Holidays.”

Resources:

[Aging Life Care Association](#): A Geriatric Care Manager can help with assessments and options

[Covid and Holiday Gatherings](#): Tips for planning a gathering this holiday season

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