With the holidays right around the corner, it's time to consider dementia friendly holiday practices! Holidays are often a time of joy, but they can also pose unique challenges to people living with dementia and their families. Below are some tips to consider and share.

**Consider the Environment**

- Consider toning down the distracting decorations, such as blinking lights or decorations with repetitive movement or sound. Avoid potential dangers, such as burning candles or fake fruit on the table.

**Consider the Timeline**

- A person with dementia may need to keep attendance at a holiday gathering brief. It can become exhausting or overwhelming being surrounded by all of the people, activities, and food. Perhaps an hour of celebrating is better for them than a full day.

- Meet the person where they are comfortable. Consider spreading the visits across a few days instead of all in a single day, providing one-on-one visits instead of the large group gathering.

- People living with dementia may get more confused or tired in the evenings. Consider celebrating earlier in the day.

**Provide a Quiet Space**

- A person with dementia may need a quieter room to rest or visit with a person one-on-one instead of the full group.
Prepare the Other Guests

- Provide an update to other guests on the new symptoms of the person with dementia beforehand if possible. Offer helpful communication tips and set realistic expectations.

Adapt the Activities

- Some traditions may need to be cut or adapted. Focus on what works best now, not what you've always traditionally done.

- Prepare a back up activity in case the person with dementia gets overstimulated or anxious during a gathering. This may include looking at photos, going for a walk, or leaving early if needed.

Have an "Escape Plan"

- A person living with dementia may get exhausted or overwhelmed at the family gathering earlier than they have in the past. Maybe it's difficult for them to make it through opening gifts or dinner time. Have a plan ahead of time to help your loved one leave early if needed - drive separately, make an excuse (running to the store, looking at holiday lights, etc.), or something else for your "escape plan."

Extend Patience to Others

- Often, other family members have unrealistic expectations for their family member with dementia. If you have a loved one with dementia, extend grace and patience. Dementia can be different day-to-day, and bustling holiday celebrations can be extremely overstimulating. A little patience can go a long way.

Source: Dementia Friendly Iowa Winter Newsletter.
Email Megan Zimmerman at mzimmerman@nei3a.org or call 319-287-1182 to learn more about Dementia Friendly Iowa.