Coping at Christmas

Being realistic about a loved one's limitations can help make life easier.

December 6, 2012 By Kate Ferguson

When a family member develops Alzheimer's disease or a similar dementia, you should expect a change in the your holiday traditions. But you can take concrete steps that create the best odds for an enjoyable experience, says Nataly Rubinstein, a licensed clinical social worker and certified geriatric care manager.

"When someone you know and love is diagnosed with one of these diseases, the 'new normal' can be difficult to understand, accept and deal with, especially around the holidays," says Rubinstein, author of *Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias: The Caregiver's Complete Survival Guide*.

Rubinstein speaks from personal experience, not just professional know-how. She was her mother's primary caregiver for 16 years after her mom's dementia diagnosis.

Rubinstein says if the diagnosis is fairly recent, family members and friends tend to feel some mix of fear and dread as the holiday season approaches.

In response, Rubinstein suggests that we manage our expectations. "While it might sound Scrooge-like, it's wise to hope for the best while preparing yourself for the worst."

In addition, be realistic about whatever your family dynamics are—the good, the bad and the ugly. "If you know this going in, you'll be much less frustrated when your family acts like, well, your family," Rubinstein says.

Most important, caregivers should make time for themselves. Arrange for someone to watch your mother while you attend to personal obligations or desires. Says Rubinstein: "If you remain positive and adaptable, I promise this season can still be full of celebrations to cherish."

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