

CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

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Summer Vacation Considerations for Caretakers

With the summer season here, thoughts of taking a vacation can stir up mixed emotions if you are a caregiver to a person with Alzheimer's Disease or dementia. Questions like, "Can I travel with my loved one?" to "Is it better to simply staycation with my loved one?" to "How can I slip away for a few days of vacation and make sure my loved one is properly care taken?" all come to mind if you are either care-taking someone in your home or making sure they are properly supported in their own home or if your love one is in long-term care.

As discussed in previous newsletter pieces, self-care is essential for anyone who is a caretaker. Here are some tips for evaluating the kind of break that is optimal as well as how to navigate a vacation with someone who needs help and supports.

Here are the questions that should asked before a travel vacation is even planned:

Is my loved one someone who does well in crowded, loud, or confusing situations? If the answer to this is a resounding "no," maybe a travel vacation is not the best idea. A good evaluation of this is when you take them out to malls, movies, grocery stores, etc., do they become agitated, sad, angry, or escalating, just think of how they will be in a crowded airport or train station, which can be bustling and noisy and where plans can change up on a dime.

How advanced is their dementia? People in the early stage of Alzheimer's and dementia are generally more open and able to travel.

Where are you going and how will you get there? Going to a familiar place is better for someone who is struggling with memory. Also, driving in a car to your destination gives more flexibility. If taking an airplane, make sure the trip is a short one and a direct flight, as airports can be chaotic and upsetting, as can delayed flights and the stress of rescheduling on the fly.

Is the trip truly of importance, truly worth it? Yes, beaches are beautiful and fun, but if there is a beach you can get to in a day trip, in the end it might be wise to choose that over a beach in Hawaii if that trip would take an entire day of plane travel to achieve. Family and school reunions can have great meaning to an older person, so those trips are worth the extra effort.

Will there be extra support for you at the vacation destination? Make certain before you travel that there are things in place that can give you back-up when you arrive—a caregiver agency if you decide to explore on your own, a nearby hospital if things go wrong medically for your loved one, food that all members of your travel party can eat, and a place to stay that accommodates any physical limitations.

Are you truly in a good place mentally, emotionally, and physically to travel with your loved one who has Alzheimer's or dementia? If you are exhausted, burned out, feeling outsized amounts of anger or resentment, filled with worry that the trip will be a disaster—listen to these gut feelings and do not undertake a major trip.

Staycations can be a great alternative to travel. Visiting local museums, movie theatre, sporting events, historical landmarks, botanical gardens, beaches, theme parks, lakes, and national parks can be a more reasonable and enjoyable option. Call ahead and see if there are accommodations that can be made for an older person with limited mobility and who needs an environment with less stress and over-stimulation. Many tourist destinations have special-needs accommodations and support staff in place and asking for this back-up ahead of times assures you will have an improved experience.



Finally, your loved one might be exhibiting behaviors and symptoms that make traveling with them too dangerous even for a day-trip. If any of the following are happening with a person you love who is struggling with Alzheimer's or dementia, you might wish to find a way to engage them in their home or neighborhood environment:

- Frequent confusion, disorientation, or agitation (even in familiar places)
- Getting anxious or upset in crowded or loud environments
- Begging to go home while on short outings or visits
- Unstable medical conditions
- Delusional, paranoid, or inappropriate behavior
- Physical or verbal aggression
- Much later stage dementia (they no longer know who they are or who you are or how to ask for help getting back to you)
- Sudden yelling, screaming, or crying
- Wandering or exit seeking behavior
- Problems managing incontinence
- High risk of falls

Making the decision to take a vacation and leave your loved one with caretakers can be a difficult one, but keep in mind that you can always find the kind of care that makes your loved one feel safe, secure, and entertained. Ask friends and family to stop by and visit your loved one to give them an extra dose of fun and familiarity. You will come back from a vacation renewed and rejuvenated, which is a gift to everyone!

Remember, if you must stay local or even in the home rather than traveling, there are ways to make it seem as if you are being transported to somewhere else. Decorate a room with a party theme that says Hawaiian luau or New Orleans Mardi Gras or Parisian café for example and match it with food that evokes these destinations, party hats, and music. Create an experience in the backyard or a close outdoor space that says party or vacation. Your loved one will appreciate any effort you make to bring them into the vibe of summer vacation!

Summer Tomato Salad with Cheese and Crispy Onions

3 Tbsp. sherry vinegar or red wine vinegar

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tsp. Dijon mustard

1 tsp. honey

Kosher salt, freshly ground pepper

8 cups lettuce leaves (butter, bibb, romaine, and/or baby mixed greens)

2 cups mixed tomatoes (heirloom, roma, cherry) cut into small pieces

3 oz. feta, goat or blue cheese, crumbled

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup store-bought fried onions or shallots

Preparation

Step 1

**Whisk oil, vinegar, mustard, and honey in a small bowl until smooth.
Season vinaigrette with salt and pepper.**

Step 2

Arrange lettuce and tomatoes in shallow bowls or on plates and drizzle vinaigrette over; season with salt. Top with cheese and fried onions.

