Managing Holiday Traditions

One of the qualities of strong families is that they share a tradition of positive family traditions. Many of these traditions revolve around holidays. Whether the tradition is sharing the evening meal or sleeping in on Saturday mornings, these habits provide a sense of continuity and structure to family life. This structure is especially important for children in the family, providing them with a greater sense of security.

Of course, we often think about family traditions being positive, but some families have negative family traditions that are painful and destructive. Drinking too much and becoming abusive is an example of a harmful tradition that continues to plague some families.

Just as parents rethink holiday traditions as children grow older, families often need to rethink family traditions as some family members age and need increasing caregiving support. Happy holiday traditions don’t just happen by themselves – the adult women in many families are the “keepers” of holiday traditions, meaning they work hard behind the scenes to decorate the home, shop for gifts, and prepare the meals. These same women are often the primary caregivers for seniors, which itself can be a stressful process. Add the stress of maintaining holiday traditions to the stress of caregiving and you have some worn out, unhappy caregivers at holiday time.

Here are some considerations that may help you maintain important holiday traditions and your sanity at the same time:

• Make a list of your usual holiday traditions – preparing
• goodies, sending cards, buying gifts, traveling to Grandma’s house, etc. Are these all still important to you, and others? Could you give up a few, or do less of each of them, or delegate something to a family member?
• Compare this list to your list of caregiving responsibilities. Most of these duties are not negotiable – they must get done and you need to do them. Be realistic with yourself and your care recipient about which holiday traditions can be adapted to your current reality.
• Your care recipient’s appearance and abilities may have changed since the last time your family was together. Young children, in particular, may not understand why Granddad can’t hear them or why he is in a wheelchair. They might even be frightened by some behaviors or comments. Plan how you’ll handle this with kids.
• Consider starting some new family traditions to accommodate changing family needs and interests. Could someone else prepare the meal, or do potluck, or even go to a restaurant? Could someone in the next generation assume leadership in making plans and communicating them?
• Can you anticipate that having certain family members together will likely result in some kind of drama?

If so, plan ahead for that possibility. Ask them privately to please avoid sensitive topics, or go outside to smoke or whatever other behavior creates stress.
• Reframe your thinking about the holiday to what it is today, rather than what it may have been in the past. Change can be good, and every positive experience is a gift for you and your care recipient. Make the most of the season and take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Your Resources

Right-Sizing Your Home for Retirement

Increasingly, people are choosing to remain in their current home after retirement. This is due in part to the shifting definition of retirement as more Americans move away from thinking about retirement as “all play and no work” to viewing it as a time to redefine their work or start a second career.

If you decide to remain in your current home, you will need to “right-size” it to meet your needs as you age. “Right-sizing” means making changes to your home that adapt it to meet your current needs. One of the most important things you can do is think outside the box. For example, if you have a home where all bedrooms are on the second
floor, then convert one of those rooms you seldom use like the dining room or formal living room, into a bedroom. The first floor bedroom will be useful if you have surgery, develop arthritis or are unable to climb stairs.

Start right-sizing your home by making a list of the changes you need to make so it becomes more accessible. The list can be overwhelming, so start making a few changes each year. Below is a list you can use to get started thinking about changes you may need to make in your home.

1. Declutter your home by giving away furniture to open up more floor space.
2. Move commonly-used kitchen items to lower shelves so they are easily reached without the use of a stepstool.
3. Move a sturdy chair with arms on it into your bedroom so you will have a place to sit when getting dressed.
4. Increase lighting on steps and in hallways. To reduce energy costs, use solar powered lights on outdoor steps and porches.
5. Install a handheld or moveable shower head.
6. Replace knob style faucets and door handles with lever style. Lever style faucet and door handles are easier for people with arthritis to open.
7. Install grab bars in the shower and near the toilet (they should withstand 250 pounds of force). You may need to reinforce the walls.
8. Add handrails on both sides of stairwells and on front and rear steps.
9. Remove throw rugs or secure them.
10. Put anti-slip tape on stairs into the house and basement. The tape has a texture like sandpaper and helps prevent slips.
11. Widen doorways to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers. They should provide at least a 32 inches opening.
12. When replacing your washer and dryer, purchase appliances that are front loading and on a raised platform for easier access.
13. If you have plush or uneven carpeting on the floors, replace it with low pile or hard surface flooring.
14. Install a ramp. The slope, or incline, should be slight and make it at least 36 inches wide to accommodate a person in a wheelchair.
15. Add raised beds so you can keep gardening. Make the beds high enough that you do not have to bend down to work in them.
16. Move your bedroom to the first floor.

Modifications to your home can be costly and securing funding is challenging. The federal government provides some
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home improvement loans and grants. There are also non-profit organizations that provide assistance to people with limited financial resources. Below are some resources for finding a home improvement loan or assistance in making modifications to your home:

- U.S. Housing & Urban Development Home Improvement Loans

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Repair & Rehabilitation Loan and Grant
  http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HSF_SFH.html

- Veterans Affairs Grants
  http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/

- Georgia Home Repair information

To learn more about home safety and aging in place, contact UGA Cooperative Extension at 1-800-ASK-UGA1 or http://www.gafamilies.org.

Your Health

Better Late Than Never

A long-term study of men in Uppsala, Sweden published in the British Medical Journal indicates that becoming more active at an older age helps reduce mortality rates. The study followed men who were about 50 years of age in 1970 for 35 years. The researchers tracked the men’s activity levels, blood pressure, weight, cholesterol levels, alcohol use and incidence of chronic disease.

The men in the study rated their activity levels using a questionnaire. Men who spent most of their time reading, watching TV, going to movies or mainly doing activities where they were seated were seen as the most inactive. Men who walked or biked for pleasure were said to be moderately active and men that did at least three hours a week of active recreational sports, heavy gardening, hard physical training or competitive sports were rated as the most active.

The researchers then followed up with the men every 10 years to recheck their health status and activity levels. They also tracked the number of deaths in the group. For the first 5 years, the researchers found that increasing activity to the highest level did not lower death rates in the men that were inactive or moderately active. But after 10 years of continued high levels of activity, mortality rates did go down and equaled the lower rates of the men who had been the most active all along. The men who were the
most active were expected to live about 2-3 years longer than the men who were the least active.

The researchers compared the effect of physical activity to other lifestyle changes like stopping smoking, lowering blood cholesterol or taking blood pressure medicine that also lower mortality rates. They found that sustaining high physical activity for 10 years was similar to stopping smoking for at least 10 years. Physical activity had a greater effect on mortality than lowering blood pressure or cholesterol.

So at least for older men in Sweden who were active after age 50, more is better. Whether this will be true for women or people from other ethnic or racial groups is unclear. But this study adds to the mounting evidence that physical activity is a powerful way to live a longer, healthier life.

Cranberry-Apple Pork Roast

Here is a delicious, easy-to-fix entrée to serve your holiday guests. Leftovers freeze well in individual packets that can be thawed and reheated in the microwave.

12 Servings

3 pound boneless pork roast
2 medium apples, unpeeled & sliced
2 medium onions, quartered
3 medium carrots, sliced into 1 in chunks
3 cloves garlic, minced
4 sprigs fresh rosemary
1 tablespoon fresh thyme
1 cup apple cider or apple-cranberry juice

1) Place the pork roast in a shallow roasting pan.
2) Surround with the apples, onions and carrots.
3) Sprinkle the meat, apples, onions, and carrots with the garlic.
4) Lay the fresh herbs on the meat.
5) Pour over the cider or juice.
6) Roast uncovered in a 350 degree oven for 1½ hours or until a meat thermometer placed in the thickest part of the meat registers 160 degrees F.
7) Remove from oven when done and let rest 10 minutes before slicing. Serve with cooked apples, carrots and onions on the side.

Nutritional Analysis:
Calories: 320
Carbohydrate: 9 grams
Protein: 31 grams
Fat: 17 grams
Saturated Fat: 6 grams
Cholesterol: 93 grams
Sodium: 78 milligrams
Fiber: less than 1 gram
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Phone: 1-800-ASK-UGA1

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