

Tips to help older relatives and friends enjoy the holiday season

December 21 2015, by Caroline Bird



Professor Nancy Pachana with her father, Joseph T Pachana

The festive season can provoke positive and negative feelings in people of all ages, but can pose particular challenges for some older people, a University of Queensland expert has warned.

UQ Ageing Mind Initiative co-director Professor Nancy Pachana has urged Queenslanders to pay special heed to the potential needs of older friends and relatives over the holiday period.

"Holidays can be highly stressful, confusing or even depressing for [older](#)

[people](#) if their mental, physical and emotional needs are ignored," she said.

"Older family members with special needs can get lost in the chaos of happy family gatherings, so it's important to remember to be sensitive to their needs."

She said forward planning was an important ingredient in reducing seasonal stress and making shared time together enjoyable for all.

The Aging Mind Initiative, has drawn on advice from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine to offer a series of tips for holiday harmony.

"The noise and confusion of a large family gathering can lead to irritability or exhaustion for some older persons, so organise a quiet area with refreshments and good seating for them to have a break or just talk quietly with others," Professor Pachana said.

"If a holiday get-together is held in the home of an [older person](#) with memory impairment, don't rearrange the furniture, and put used items of crockery and such back in their accustomed place – these disruptions can be a source of confusion and anxiety."

She said photo albums, family videos or music – even familiar traditional holiday dishes – could help stimulate memories and encourage older [family](#) members to share their stories or recipes.

Professor Pachana said it was important to reach out to older people who may be alone at this time of the year.

"Reach out to an older relative or friend. Take fruitcake to a neighbour who lives alone. Bring the kids or your dog over to visit a relative who

lives alone. Such acts lead to long-lasting positive feelings for both parties."

Professor Pachana said seasonal blues could have a profound impact on older people, and it was important to ensure they felt socially connected.

"Depression is not a normal part of ageing. It should not be ignored, and simple acts of reaching out can help ward off loneliness at this time of year."

Provided by University of Queensland

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