

Dear Care Manager:

We want to include my 95 year old aunt, now residing at a personal care home, in our family Thanksgiving dinner plans; however, we are afraid she may not be able to manage the physical and social challenges. My brother hosts Thanksgiving and he lives one and a half hours away. This is a long car ride for her. The holiday foods upset her gastrointestinal system. She gets anxious about bathroom access. My brother and his wife serve dinner early evening and my aunt gets very tired by then. Conversation gets noisy with several people talking at the same time in a modest sized home. Auntie's hearing aids start to buzz and she gets annoyed. My sister-in-law's father, age 90, is the only other frail senior. He is higher functioning than auntie, and they do not have much in common except for comparing stories about their ailments. We feel guilty not including her in a holiday celebration, but wonder if it is worth the effort. Signed, Doing the Turkey Trot.

Dear Doing the Turkey Trot,

Suggest to the Activities Director, and other staff at the personal care home, to invite your aunt to all special activities. Be sure she is present for the home's holiday meal. Most personal care homes prepare holiday foods that will be well tolerated by seniors. Consider inviting your aunt to your home for brunch or a light lunch on Thanksgiving Day before you head out to be with other family. Finally, ask her what she wants to do. Often seniors, who live in facilities, like the security of their own environment and don't want the anxiety of dealing with an unfamiliar place.

Alternatively, take her with you. Ask for some cooperation from your brother and sister-in-law. Modify the foods she will be served (i.e. limit high fat, spicy foods, and rich desserts). Have a bed or sofa available in a quiet place so she could rest if desired. Be vigilant about stairs, throw rugs, uneven floors, and low chairs which may be fall hazards. Assist her to select clothing that is stylish, yet comfortable. Take a change of clothing. Plan where she will sit at the table so she is not excluded from conversation. Limit the outing so she does not become overly tired. Leave for home before it gets too late.

Try to accommodate to the best of your ability, then relax and enjoy the holiday!