

Caregiving at a Cookout:

14 Tips to Ensure a Good Time

Almost everyone looks forward to gathering with family and friends for a [backyard barbecue](#). But if you've been dreading going to one because of your responsibilities as a caregiver, never fear: Both you and your elderly loved one can have a fine time, if you plan ahead.



But first, make sure that your relative is in good enough health to attend a party where there will be heat, bugs, noise, smoke from the grill and possibly rambunctious children. Also, check with your hosts to ensure that they understand and can accommodate your loved one's

limitations. If not, find another caregiver to look after your relative while you attend alone; it's important for you to socialize and recharge.

However, if your hosts are amenable and your loved one is up to it, don't leave him or her behind. Joan Wright, a certified geriatric manager at NVNA and Hospice in Norwell, Mass., told AgingCare.com that you should remember that every elderly person was once young, mobile and eager to socialize. "Those desires are still there even if their physical capacity to fulfill them is not."

Here are some tips from Ms. Wright and others to ensure that everyone has a good time:

Before the barbecue

--Talk to the host or hostess about dietary limitations your elderly relative may have. If the menu is too spicy, fatty or hard to chew, plan to bring some food that the senior can eat, and request that the meal be served at the same time as everyone else's.

--Find out what sort of seating the hosts will have for guests. If they just have backless picnic benches, which can be difficult for an elderly person to sit on and provide no back support, ask if you can bring a folding chair or stackable plastic chair.

- If your relative is in a wheelchair, find out in advance if your hosts' gates are wide enough and slopes gentle enough to maneuver it into the back yard.
- Ask if there's any shade in the backyard; if not, ask if you can also bring a portable beach umbrella.
- Lay out comfortable clothes that include layers, since some seniors feel cold even when it's warm out. Include sturdy shoes to prevent trips and falls.
- Before you go, make sure that the senior has put on some sunscreen.

At the barbecue

- Set up a spot for your relative away from the hot grill and any areas where children are likely to be throwing balls or rough-housing.
- Find out the location of the closest bathroom, and if accidents could be a problem, seat the senior near it. If your relative needs assistance using the restroom, you might want to arrange a discreet hand sign or code word between you so you can excuse yourself to help without embarrassing him or her.
- If your relative can't get around much but is sociable, bring other partygoers over for brief chats.
- Since dehydration can be a problem with elderly people, make sure that a glass of water is always at hand. Avoid alcoholic beverages, which are not only dehydrating but also can conflict with medications.
- If you must cut some meat off a bone or corn off of a cob, do it in the kitchen and then bring the plate to the senior. Cutting up food in front of other partygoers puts the senior in an embarrassing, child-like position.
- If your relative can't get around much but is sociable, bring other partygoers over for brief chats. And ask other family members or friends to sit down with the senior from time to time so you can mingle, too.
- If your loved one can't communicate well, bring headphones, a CD player and some music. He or she will be able to enjoy being around others without being under pressure to talk.
- Watch your loved one for signs of restlessness, overheating or other distress, and be prepared to leave before the festivities end.

Source: Agingcare.com

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