

# Celebrating the Fourth of July in Memory Care

by Brooke DeNisco

Many holidays are a mixed blessing in memory care communities. Plenty of people with memory loss still remember holidays and enjoy the special events and decorations that go with them. Others can feel overwhelmed and displaced. Social distancing and other safety measures will likely be in place on this July 4, so it is likely to be more "low-key" than usual. Here are some other things to keep in mind for the holiday.

## Decorations

Put up the red, white, and blue streamers and flags no earlier than July 3, and take them down no later than July 5. People with memory loss are often looking to the environment for clues. If they see American flags and red, white, and blue bunting, there is a good chance they'll recognize it's the Fourth of July. If it's actually only July 1, you'll spend many days explaining that July 4 is in a few days. Correcting people and telling them that what they are observing in their environment is not accurate is easy to avoid by keeping decorations brief.

## Anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Approximately [one in five veterans suffers from PTSD](#). As more veterans of the Korean and Vietnam Wars enter old age, the percentage will likely rise. Whether someone has PTSD or not, the loud, gun-like sound of fireworks can be very startling, especially when they are at random intervals. Keep the windows closed and play some music if people in the neighborhood are setting off firecrackers or fireworks.

Display images of fireworks or live firework shows on your community television(s). A visual allows people to associate the sounds they hear with a picture of something that is non-threatening and even enjoyable to watch. [PBS](#) broadcasts and streams fireworks from several locations. Their website also includes quizzes, trivia, and behind-the-scenes extras from fireworks displays. [The Macy's fireworks in New York City](#) (still taking place this year) are on TV at 8 p.m. EDT (or 5 p.m. PDT) on the Fourth. There are plenty of [DVDs featuring fireworks and music](#) and [free streaming sources](#).

## Routine

Don't ditch all your usual activities because it's a holiday. Routine is an anchor that will enable people to enjoy the holiday more. This year, the Fourth falls on a Saturday. Keep some of your regular Saturday activities on the calendar so people feel safe and grounded. For example, if you usually start the day with exercise and a ball toss, start the holiday that way, too.

## Outdoor Events

Have water and sunscreen available! This is a no-brainer, but even after working in activities for years, it is easy to get busy and forget the basics. Hats, sunglasses, and snacks help, too. Pack a bag with the essentials ahead of time.

Encourage people to go outdoors in small groups and to be flexible. If people are overheated, overwhelmed, or tired, gracefully cut the outdoor activity short.