

HOLIDAY TIPS

CARING FOR YOUR PARENTS: EDUCATION FOR THE FAMILY CAREGIVER®



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Holidays are supposed to be times of joy, celebration, and rest. But in reality, the holidays can feel like a rollercoaster with emotions running high as your ‘gas tank’ is on low. There are just too many things to do – presents to shop for, decorations to hang, holiday treats to bake and family gatherings to organize. On top of all this, you need to think of your senior loved ones and how to provide the best care for them over the holiday season.

With everything we have to do over the holidays we can feel stressed out. However, according to experts, the main reason for holiday stress is having unrealistic expectations. From the time we are children we build up expectations of what the holidays should be. In the media we see perfect images of family, friends, food, parties, and gifts. What we fail to see is that these are staged scenes. We may all aspire to be Martha Stewart, but the reality will probably be less than perfection. What we have to realize over the holidays is that there's nothing wrong with falling short of perfect.

In this workshop, we'll share some ways to help manage expectations and make the holidays fun, all while minimizing stress for you, as a caregiver, and your family. We will discuss holiday travel and shopping, gift giving and family gatherings. In addition we will talk about specific things you can do to help your senior loved ones beat the holiday blues.

PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Traveling during the holidays, whether it's cross-town or across the country, can be frustrating and full of delays. To help trips with your senior loved ones go more smoothly, here are a few tips:

- **Allow plenty of time.** The roads are busiest on the days right before and after the major holidays.
- **Call ahead.** Make arrangements with the hotel, church, synagogue or airport for a wheelchair and other special equipment they might need.
- **Ask for help.** If you think you will need assistance, call a family friend or contact a home-care company to obtain a caregiver to assist with the trip.
- **Watch for safety hazards.** Safety is a prime consideration when traveling with the elderly. Balance and footing are challenges for many seniors – rainy or snowy weather conditions can make them even more so.
- **Remember important items.** Don't forget to pack your loved one's address book which lists all of their doctors' phone numbers, as well as their medications and cell phone.

The holiday season also is a time for gift giving and many seniors like to do their own shopping, but they need a bit of help. Be sure to shop at the time of the day when you know your senior will have the most energy. If your senior has health issues, don't plan an entire day away from home. Also, if your senior needs oxygen, medications or a cane, make sure you have those items before leaving the house.

So now that you've helped your senior do their holiday shopping, what are some practical gifts you can give them? As we age, being on one's own becomes more challenging. Here are a few gadgets geared toward making independent living easier:



- **A large button cell phone** is a good idea. They make calling easier for seniors with a large lighted display, big buttons, speed dialing and caller ID.
- Designed primarily for the hearing impaired but useful for all of us, are **doorbells and telephones that flash a light** in addition to ringing.
- **A large button universal TV remote control** is another handy tool that makes seeing the numbers and pressing the right buttons so much easier for seniors.
- Lastly, seniors can find digital clocks confusing and hard to set. So give them a **large faced electric wall clock**. It's easy to read and has no batteries to replace!

Notes:

HELPFUL TIPS FOR HOLIDAY GATHERINGS

During busy family gatherings it is important for everyone to be aware of and considerate of elderly family members' needs. Here are some suggestions:

- **Talk to family and friends before they arrive.** If your senior is easily confused, has trouble eating or has behaviors that guests might not understand, explain the circumstances to them and let them know how to approach the situation.
- **Limit noise and commotion.** A noisy environment, especially if young children are present, may be upsetting to seniors. Provide a quiet, private space for a nap or to take a break from the festivities.
- **Watch for obstacles.** Create clear pathways for walking and be careful of throw rugs and wires.
- **Encourage participation.** Ask your senior loved one to join helpers in the kitchen. Create a comfortable place for them to sit and keep them involved in the conversation.
- **Plan inclusive activities.** Arrange activities that everyone can participate in, such as taking a walk, looking at photographs or listening to short stories. Planned activities that all ages will enjoy can lower the stress of the occasion and encourage positive communication.



Did you know...?

One in three Americans now has some type of diet restriction as a result of diabetes, celiac disease, food allergies and other conditions. In addition, many seniors must adhere to low or no-sodium diets.

Source: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- **Accommodate dietary restrictions.** Many families wish to hold on to long-time holiday food traditions, but these old traditions don't always fit with new realities. One easy way to make sure a variety of dietary needs are satisfied is to serve your holiday meal buffet-style. It's a great way to introduce new and healthy dishes while keeping a few of the traditional favorites. Those with dietary restrictions might only be able to eat the side dishes yet they will feel right at home with a buffet. And remember – making dishes that meet special dietary guidelines doesn't have to mean more time in the kitchen for family caregivers.

Check out holiday timesaving tips at thehealthycookingblog.com:

- Make and freeze casseroles, dressings and desserts ahead of time and cross them off your list.
- Cut, chop and wash ingredients earlier in the week
- Cook what you enjoy preparing and purchase the rest.
- For dessert, visit your local bakery – that's their specialty!
- Buy theme napkins and plates for quicker clean up.
- For an easy and fast centerpiece, fill a bowl with fresh fruit or a vase with cranberries to hold flowers.

Notes:

BEAT THE HOLIDAY BLUES

The holidays are a great time to spend with family and friends. But for many seniors the holidays can be stressful, confusing, or even depressing if their mental, physical and emotional needs are not taken into account.

It is important not to confuse the holiday blues with depression. If your senior loved one seems depressed, take them to their doctor. Depression is not a normal part of aging and should never be ignored. A physical examination can help determine whether there are any physical causes for their depression. If not, his or her doctor can decide if the senior might benefit from seeing a mental health professional.

The “holiday blues” are feelings of profound sadness that can be provoked by many of the activities of the holiday season. They may be brought on by seasonal affective disorder or more commonly called “winter depression”. This is a seasonal illness that can sap your energy and make you moody. It can be provoked by reductions in sunlight during the short days of winter so it is important for seniors who spend much of their time indoors to make time for activities that will increase their exposure to daylight.

To help offset the holiday blues:

- **Stick to the schedule.** Help your senior family member adhere to their regular schedule of medications.
- **Avoid drinking too much alcohol.** Abusing alcohol can provoke inappropriate behavior and can interfere with medications.
- **Take a stroll down memory lane.** Often, seniors are able to share stories and observations from the distant past. Those shared memories are important for the entire family as well – children enjoy hearing what it was like when their grandparents were young. Use picture albums, family videos and music, even theme songs from old radio or TV programs to help stimulate memories and encourage seniors to share their stories and experiences.
- **Create new memories.** We all enjoy having new activities to anticipate and for seniors this is especially true. The sense of anticipation can help to minimize the holiday blues and generate excitement for what lies ahead. Add some new holiday activities this year, such as taking a drive to look at holiday decorations, window-shopping at the mall or strolling along a festive downtown street.

Notes:

TAKING ACTION

For many seniors the holidays can be stressful, confusing, or even depressing. They may be missing a loved one or remembering a time when they were more active.

However there are things you can do to make the holiday season easier and more enjoyable for your loved one, and for you.

Think about your next steps, and how you can create your own action plan:

1. Things I can do to make the holidays easier and more enjoyable for my senior loved one are:
2. Resources that I can enlist to help with holiday tasks, such as shopping and preparing meals are:
3. Ways to help my loved one beat the holiday blues include:

Action plan:
