



## Caregiving over the holidays

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The holiday season can be a wonderful time to meet with friends and family. For those caring for a friend or family member, the season comes with special challenges. In addition to the tasks of caregiving, the extra energy needed to take part in social celebrations can be taxing.

Take stock of how much energy you have and how much you can expend. It may mean that you have to attend fewer functions. It may mean that you can't bring that special dish, which you're famous for, to the pot luck. It may be a time to draw on resources that you don't normally use. For example visiting family members may be able to take the person you're caring for on a special outing. The key is to be aware of what your body is telling you

Remember that the person you are caring for may not be able to adapt to social situations in the same way they used to.

Also, try to arrange respite care early. It's a busy time for everyone, whether it's your

neighbour or a health professional, so putting in timely request can ensure you get a slot in their datebook.

The holiday season can be a good opportunity to communicate with family members and to gain support from them. Give yourself permission to discuss your feelings about being a caregiver. Friends and relatives may not realize the impact that caregiving is having on your life. Many of us are hesitant to share our feelings for fear of causing worry or conflict. You may find that simply sharing your frustrations or difficulties may make the load lighter.

The holidays are traditionally a time that centers on family celebrations and traditions. Being unable to celebrate the way you used to can be a loss in itself. But it's an opportunity to relive those past celebrations and traditions with conversations and photographs. It may be a good opportunity gather the family for a home movie night. While you may not be able to recreate past traditions, it's a good time to pass on the responsibility to younger family members

**Don't forget to think about your own needs and to make up your own holiday wish list:** lunch with your child or grandchild, a gift certificate for a massage, a bestselling mystery novel – whatever will bring you enjoyment and renewal.

The December holidays may be one of life's ways to brighten winter, to create opportunities to gather with friends and family and to enjoy good food. What's important is to give yourself permission to simplify the season, to be aware of your limits and to care, not only for others, but also for yourself.