

# Holiday Stress When You're Caregiving

Caring For You And Your Loved Ones

Roberta Schneider

No material in this book is intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new health care regimen, and never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking care.

Holiday Stress When You're Caregiving: Caring For You And Your Loved Ones

@2021 Roberta Schneider. All rights reserved.

## [Introduction](#)

### [Feeling Overwhelmed Already? Surviving Daily Stressors During The Holidays](#)

#### [Why Your Stress Matters](#)

#### [Set Your Mindset](#)

[Realize what you can and cannot control.](#)

[Focus on what you can do, not the to-do.](#)

[Give yourself grace.](#)

[Set clear boundaries.](#)

[Own your calendar.](#)

[Rethink how you do daily tasks.](#)

#### [Own Your Emotions](#)

#### [Cultivate Gratitude](#)

#### [Find Your Meaning This Season](#)

### [Have A Healthy Holiday Season](#)

#### [Maintenance Matters](#)

#### [Check In With Yourself](#)

### [Simplify Your Holidays](#)

#### [Making Your List](#)

#### [Checking It Twice](#)

#### [Involve Your Family In Decisions](#)

#### [Give New Life To Old Ways](#)

#### [Find Joy Beyond The Holidays](#)

### [Fight Financial Stress During And After The Holidays](#)

[Be mindful of your budget.](#)

[Simplify gifts.](#)

### [Including Your Loved One In Holiday Celebrations](#)

#### [Communicate With Your Family](#)

#### [Considering Travel While Caregiving](#)

#### [Hosting Holiday Gatherings](#)

[Being aware of your care recipient](#)

[Having energy for hosting](#)

[Meal planning](#)

[Finding activities for the whole family](#)

### [A Caregiver's Holiday Wish List](#)

#### [Respite](#)

#### [Emotional Support](#)

#### [Errands](#)

#### [Home Help](#)

## [Reset After The Holidays](#)

[Return To Routine](#)

[Refresh Your House](#)

[Restore Your Optimism](#)

[Be Mindful](#)

[Log Off](#)

[Give Yourself Grace](#)

[Debrief For Next Year](#)

## [Final Thoughts](#)

## [Resources](#)

[Caregiving](#)

[Financial Stress](#)

[Kerr, Nancy. \(2021, June 29\). Family Caregivers Spend More Than \\$7,200 a Year on Out-of-Pocket Costs. AARP.](#)

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/info-2021/high-out-of-pocket-costs.html>

[Holidays & Mental Health](#)

[Mental Health](#)

## [About The Author](#)

# Introduction

It's the happiest time of the year. Until it isn't.

More than 6 in 10 of us experience increased stress and fatigue during the holidays. And when you're already juggling the challenge of caregiving, that extra stress can beat you down.

Caregiving brings a mix of emotions, on top of the physical stress. Resentment, disappointment, feeling down, grief or loneliness may be among the myriad of feelings stealing your holiday joy.

If you're feeling more humbug than happy this holiday season, you can take steps to regain your holiday joy and reduce the post-holiday blues. Even before the busyness of the holiday season begins, you can learn to control more of your smaller stressors that sap your joy.

And while this holiday season might not look like it did in years past, you can find comfort and joy even while caregiving.

# Feeling Overwhelmed Already? Surviving Daily Stressors During The Holidays

As a caregiver you're already aware of the heightened stress that caring for a loved one's medical, mental and physical needs can be. Whether you're in a temporary situation such as assisting with recovery from a surgery or long-term caregiving for a parent or spouse, managing daily needs of caregiving on top of yours can feel overwhelming, particularly with the challenges and unpredictability of the holiday season.

## Why Your Stress Matters

Long-term stress of any kind can impact your physical and mental health, including depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, short-term memory problems, heart disease, cancer or diabetes.

Do a self-check and be mindful if you are showing signs of caregiver stress. These signs can include:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling alone, isolated or deserted by others
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Gaining or losing a lot of weight, particularly if unplanned
- Feeling tired much of the time
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Becoming easily irritated or angered
- Feeling worried or sad often
- Having headaches or body aches that can't be attributed to other factors
- Feeling constantly worried
- Using or abusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications

You can take a short caregiver self-assessment questionnaire from the American Medical Association to help evaluate your well-being. (A link is in the Resources section in the back of this book.)

But you have tools to help reduce your stress as a caregiver in daily living.

## Set Your Mindset

Caregiving is a marathon, not a sprint. Recognize you're in a time of change, and with that comes the need for patience, understanding and grace, especially for yourself. Regardless of the time of year, you are given 24 hours to work with. That time is precious. You have the ability to choose how you use it best.

### Realize what you can and cannot control.

Start out by identifying one small thing you can change that can reduce your stress. It can be as simple as switching to paper plates and disposable silverware so you don't have to fight over washing the dishes. It can be more time-intensive, such as looking into home health services or meal delivery for a night off or through a daily service like Meals on Wheels.

Don't simply look at easing caregiver tasks for you. Look at ways to help you offset personal stress, such as meal prep for lunches, having routine purchases delivered directly, ordering groceries online or hiring a housekeeper to help with the personal household tasks you dislike the most.

### Focus on what you can do, not the to-do.

Facing a long list of what you feel should get done? Aim for progress, not perfection.

A task list can easily become overwhelming. Divide your to-do list into "can," "should" and "must." Look at what you can do if you have time (like holiday decorating), what you should do (that load of dishes waiting in the sink) and what you should do (pick up medications at the pharmacy.)

On the toughest days, when things feel overwhelming, keep a "got done" list. Knowing you got the dishes done, a few bills paid and a load of laundry started in the washing machine can offer a huge relief that progress is being made.

## Give yourself grace.

Forgive any mistakes you have made or lapses in judgement when you are juggling extra responsibilities from extended caregiving during the holidays. Focus on what you need instead of what “others” expect of you. There may be times when circumstances mean you have to give less than 100% at work, or certain unwritten expectations need to slide at home. Your first priority is the health and safety of the person you are caring for and for you and your family. Everything else takes second place.

## Set clear boundaries.

If you do not have the time or energy to participate in certain holiday events, decline to participate this year. You can ask the person extending the invitation to check back next year, if you prefer.

Likewise, even if a volunteer opportunity or cause is dear to your heart, you might choose to scale back in your participation or opt to assist in an alternate way from home.

Practice “I” language. Stating “I need” is a boundary as well. If you do not have the tools or support at your disposal, it becomes far more challenging to manage the tasks at hand.

## Own your calendar.

Whether you use a planner or a digital calendar like Outlook or Google calendar, your scheduling tool is what you make of it. Use your calendar for more than just the known appointments. Set aside dedicated time for you to take a walk, do yoga, pray or participate in a class you’ve been wanting to try. Block off a night or two a week for no appointments. Or use it as a resource to help discern whether to decline a task after you’ve reviewed your existing time commitments.

If you find a growing list of items on your to-do list and calendar, ask your network for help. Maybe it’s requesting a trip to the grocery, a ride to the doctor or pick up meds from the pharmacy. You may find there are tasks even your loved ones in other cities can help with, such as online research or phone calls.

## Rethink how you do daily tasks.

Keep a notebook, a bullet journal or notepad file on your phone to organize holiday and daily tasks or just take down quick reminders for later, especially if you're having trouble concentrating or recalling things. The pandemic helped solidify tools that make things more convenient than ever. Consider using programs like store delivery or pickup, subscription shipping services for recurring orders, or outside delivery programs like Shipt, Instacart or Uber Eats.

Decide what are your non-negotiables on daily or weekly tasks. Maybe you pause on making the bed except on weekends but insist on a clean kitchen. Decide to stack errands for an afternoon, instead of racing to stops after work each night. Or give yourself the gift of a housekeeper once a month to do those household chores you truly hate.

## Own Your Emotions

Allow yourself to feel your emotions, particularly those among the holidays. The holidays may trigger grief, anxiety or a sense of loss for some people. You might be grieving your old lifestyle or the inability to enjoy certain traditions due to your loved one's physical or mental health. You might be worried about how your loved one will handle all the activity during the family gathering. Acknowledge your feelings in a journal, a support community, or in a conversation with a close friend or family member.

Not giving your feelings air can lead to you coping poorly or engaging in unhealthy habits, regardless of the time of year.

Try to maintain a low-key social outlet during the holiday season. Join a walking buddy once a week, find a person you can talk to or text when needed, bake cookies with a friend one afternoon, attend an in-person or virtual book study, or grab a coffee with a colleague.

Do not fall for the pressure to be constantly upbeat during the holidays. In this case, faking it until you make it: may not make happiness happen. Australian researchers found that feeling down - and feeling that you're not meeting the societal pressure to be happy - can actually backfire and can lead to feelings of isolation and other risk factors for depression.

## Cultivate Gratitude

This holiday season may be like no other. Try not to get stuck in a spiral of fear or negativity because of the changes in your lives. Redirect from what's changed to what's the positive in your life. Celebrate what you and your loved one have today.

Some ideas to cultivate gratitude include:

- Maintain a thankful list or gratitude jar.
- Be present. Enjoy the moments with your loved ones.
- Each day think of three positive things, even if it is just for the sunrise or for the bed at night.
- Guard against stress. Watch for signs of stress and burnout.
- Be mindful of holiday details. Enjoy the lights, the song on the radio, the smells in the kitchen.
- Remember to smile. Smiling is contagious.
- Thank those who are part of your life, whether it's through a phone call, letter or text.
- Remind your family members, it was great to see or visit with them.
- Do focus on the time you spent together, instead of any time you needed to be apart.

## Find Your Meaning This Season

Remember what makes the holiday season special to you. If what's most dear to you is an expression of your religious faith, celebrate that in whatever way you can. You can reap the emotional benefit of participating in your traditions and the physical benefits of stress reduction from participating in spiritual practices.

If it's "not the holidays" without family time, remember that "togetherness" need not always be physical; that certainly was a lesson of the pandemic. Whatever the reason, celebrate the reasons that mean the most to you, in a way that feels most comfortable to you given the challenges of this year.

Think of the small rituals that are important to you. It might be wearing new pajamas on Christmas Eve, making a favorite cookie, or listening to a particular album.

Recall too, that this is a season, not just a day. Enjoy the preparations and anticipation of the holiday as much as the day itself.

## Have A Healthy Holiday Season

Each time you fly, you see the demo about the oxygen masks and hear how adults should put their masks on before assisting others. It's the same principle with watching your physical and emotional health while caregiving. Caring for your physical and mental health will help you be the best caregiver and family member you can be, regardless of the time of year.

### Maintenance Matters

It's tempting to cut healthy habits due to time concerns, but now is not the time to skimp on protecting your mental, emotional and physical health. Resist the urge to fall into unhealthy habits like comfort eating, drinking more, or sleeping less if you're feeling stressed. When you are healthy and well-rested, you are better equipped to handle any challenges that come your way.

Schedule in time for you to get physical activity. Get sleep at night. Drink water. Take steps to reduce your risk of illness, particularly in the winter months. Follow your doctor's instructions for any medical conditions you may have.

Enjoy light, healthy meals and snacks when not at celebrations. These can be homemade, or use shortcuts such as prepared veggie trays or grab-and-go salads and soups. Try to avoid big changes in your diet - for your patient and for you.

Keep your schedule and your routines the best you can. Build in rest and stress relief - you can quickly lose that time through the holiday hustle if you are not proactive in planning for it.

### Check In With Yourself

Spending all your energy on someone else to the detriment of yourself helps no one in the end. As part of your daily routine, give yourself a status check. Are you meeting your basic needs? Are you drinking water? Eating meals? Taking your medication as prescribed? Getting moderate exercise? Making time to rest?

Then ask yourself if you could have done anything differently. Did you make time for you? Did you forget something? Add that to your notebook or calendar, and if you cannot resolve it that night, let it be until tomorrow. Each day offers an opportunity to resent. Remind yourself, "I did my best."

# Simplify Your Holidays

Feeling overwhelmed by the extra tasks associated with holiday preparations on top of the realities of caregiving and daily life? You are not alone. Set time aside early in the holiday season to simplify and prioritize your expectations for the holiday season.

## Making Your List

Start your decision-making process by focusing on what is most important to you about the holiday season. Is it expressing your faith tradition? Decorating? Hosting a dinner? Giving to others? A specific activity or outing? Itemize them all. Make a list of all the traditions and events you know of leading through the holiday season, as well as all the tasks, big and small, to make them happen.

Once that task list is written, read through it fully. What items on the list make you cringe or cause you anxiety just thinking about it? Those are the easiest to remove from your list. The others may be more difficult.

Are there items that are emotionally driven, such as you always host Thanksgiving dinner? Or you only make Grandma's apple strudel in December because you need to have it at Christmastime? Look at how you might simplify those events. You could have Thanksgiving be a potluck with everyone bringing their "can't live without dish," pick up a pie from the bakery, and use disposable plates and silverware. Or someone else could host Thanksgiving dinner for you this year. If you feel like you must make Grandma's strudel, buy frozen, sliced apples as a timesaver, and make it with a family member.

## Checking It Twice

Decide what traditions no longer serve your family. It may be dietary traditions (perhaps a family member cannot enjoy certain favorite dishes or drinks), activity (recovery from an injury precludes the annual ice skating night) or time considerations (pausing photos with Santa or

attending an annual holiday brunch). You can pause those traditions for a year, or determine it's time to retire them completely.

Continue to look through your list to see which items you could omit or limit. The holiday card list could be pruned to limiting to close family members, an email message, or no cards mailed at all. Limit the lights to one pre-lit tree placed in the window instead of decorating multiple trees throughout the house and hanging lights outdoors. Go minimalist with your decorations and have a tree with only lights or the kids' old decorations. Decide to buy sugar cookies or gingerbread kits at the store for the kids to decorate instead of baking from scratch. Make one or two batches of cookies instead of eight, for example.

Don't feel guilty about the things you do or don't do.

## Involve Your Family In Decisions

Be sure to include your other family members in the decision making and activities. Don't hide the realities of how a family member is doing from children and teens. Not only does this encourage the development of empathy, but also it helps them become more aware of the challenges facing you as a caregiver and parent. Perhaps they could even find a way to help or have a suggestion on a positive way to alter a tradition this year.

If your children want to attend events that you don't have the time or energy to drive to, ask friends or relatives if the kids can tag along.

Ask your family member whom you're caring for what they would like to do, let them take the holiday at their pace. There may be special traditions that are dear to them, or things they perhaps never had a chance to experience before. Let your loved ones remember old friends or family members and encourage sharing of memories.

Don't be limited by a date on the calendar. Celebrate Thanksgiving on a Sunday if that works best for your family. Consider 12 days of Christmas starting Dec. 26 rather than forcing all gatherings between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

## Give New Life To Old Ways

If your loved one is homebound or has restrictions, consider bringing holiday traditions to them in a reinvented way. You can watch live streamed concerts or religious services, bake homemade gifts or have a family game night in one night during the kids' winter break. Or give a rain check with plans for a "Christmas In July" celebration post-recovery.

If you do decide to attend a party or small get-together, set a time limit for how long you attend. You are not obligated to stay the entire time. Develop a signal for when one of you is ready to leave.

## Find Joy Beyond The Holidays

Don't spread yourself too thin during the busy holiday season. Now is not the time to force equality in time or physical presence with friends, family members or acquaintances. Not every person, event or cause in your life is equally important to you. It is more than acceptable to celebrate other holidays or events together throughout the year. Suggest getting together after the hectic last six weeks of the year instead of during that time period, and it may be just what your circle didn't know what they needed.

## Fight Financial Stress During And After The Holidays

The stress from caregiving doesn't stop with time management or extra responsibilities. Finances can take a considerable hit as well. One in five full-time workers in the U.S. is also a caregiver for someone who is aging, has a serious illness or has a disability. Of those workers, the caregiving needs force many to cut back to part-time hours or stop work entirely.

These caregivers often are not compensated for their time helping their loved ones, either. Nationally, 48 million Americans are unpaid caregivers, and three-fourths of these caregivers are accruing thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs.

Add these factors to a holiday season that often weighs financially on many families, and the holiday celebrations can quickly bring additional stresses by the new year.

Here are ways to help fight financial stresses during the holidays, particularly if you're a caregiver.

### Be mindful of your budget.

The average American spends more than \$1,000 on Christmas each year. Consider slimming that bill by prioritizing gift giving and planning for a set budget.

Budgeting for November and December should go well beyond the daily costs of living. Factor in any costs for parties (whether it's class parties or the office gift exchange), specialty foods, the big family dinner, office gift exchange, travel costs, wrapping paper, cards and postage, stocking stuffers, snacks, holiday desserts and charitable giving.

### Simplify gifts.

You may consider simplifying your gift giving this year. Have a frank discussion with others, asking to cut back on gift giving this year or at the least exchange items that are consumable. This helps you in the new year too. Not only do you have less expenses that can offset your budget and impact your debt, but also you may have fewer things to clean up.

If you do choose to buy or exchange gifts, consider these tips to watch your financial stress:

Don't wait until the last minute to shop or ship. If you're planning a major purchase this year, do your research early, so you can make the best decisions before the online sales begin and avoid last-minute hikes in shipping costs. Consider shopping where gift wrapping and shipping are included, or sending gift cards to a store close to the recipient's home.

Try to avoid buying clutter-creating gifts. Look for items that are useful, such as replacement items, usable (simple manicure items or food items) or edible (sauces, coffees, teas or other items from the farmers market, meal kits, spices, or beverages).

Give a second life to something. Explore library book sales, antique stores and resale shops for gift items. Or participate in a white elephant exchange.

Go together on gifts. Maybe it's a gift for a family to enjoy together, like board games and snacks for a family game night, or a dinner kit to try something new. Or join several family members to pool funds together for a needed item or special experience for someone.

Stuff stockings with practical items. Maybe it's the snacks the kids are always asking for, large-size toiletries or makeup in the brands your teens are begging for, or a bag of coffee.

Simplify your wrapping. Lean on reusable wrapping papers like gift bags.

If you decide to draw names for a gift exchange, do so with enough time for all participants to plan and prepare for it. Ensure the budget is one that everyone can work with.

Give from the heart. Ship that favorite holiday treat your brother is craving. Print a framed photo of a cherished memory.

Create homemade gifts only if it gives you joy. If you have the time, ability and budget for supplies then consider making a homemade gift. If the project causes more stress, you may reconsider whether it's the year to create homemade gifts. Likewise, if the idea of holiday baking gives you stress, consider buying from the local grocery or bakery instead. You might find the costs to be less expensive than if you prepared your own.

## Including Your Loved One In Holiday Celebrations

When your family is going through recovery or a decline in health, it's reasonable to adapt your holiday traditions. Work with your loved one to find a way to include them in a manner that is comfortable for them.

### Communicate With Your Family

Please don't wait until the family members have arrived for them to learn about the latest about their loved one. Don't say vague statements like "You'll see; Dad's different." Arm them with information they can use.

Well before the holiday planning begins, send a brief note updating on the patient's health condition. While you may approach it with a diagnosis, include information that a person can use in day-to-day interactions. Examples include:

- "Dad is having problems getting up and down from the chair and likes to spend most of his day sitting. He also needs help with the bathroom."
- "Mom seems to be more forgetful in the morning but does better in the afternoon."
- "Julie wears down easily and needs routine. She tends to nap from 2 to 4 p.m. so that may be a great time to take the kids to the park."
- "You may need to repeat questions when you're talking with Jim."

Ask your family members for help with specific tasks before or when they arrive. List specific tasks early on, such as handling bill pay, researching resources for respite care, allowing you a break to take time off, offering financial support, assisting with house cleaning, or providing transportation. Children can help with smaller tasks, like sweeping, setting the table, cleaning up tables, or putting up decorations.

If you are not seeing a family member in person, sharing the update on the family member in a holiday card is a non-confrontational way to share about the realities of a person's physical and mental health and their (and your) current needs.

## Considering Travel While Caregiving

Traveling at any time of year as a caregiver of a loved one can have its frustrations; add in busy holiday travel or poor weather, and your stress can go up to an entirely different level.

Be specific in what accommodations or assistance you need in advance. If you attend a gathering, arrange for a quiet space for the patient, and even you, to rest if they become overstimulated or tired. If there are food restrictions or other medical considerations, communicate that with the host as well.

If you plan to travel with your loved one you are caring for over the holidays, keep in mind these tips.

Determine whether car, bus, train or plane is the best mode of transportation given your personal situation. Do you need more flexibility in stopping for breaks or at the start or end of the day? Does your loved one do well in crowds, which would be high for public transportation? Do you need your concentration to be wholly on the loved one you are caring for? What time(s) of day does your loved one do best? Is traveling in winter weather a concern?

Think about whether it's worth the extra expense to stay at a hotel where you can help maintain a sleep routine instead of at a busy family gathering.

Brainstorm worst-case scenarios to see if you can come up with acceptable solutions for you. It may be how to contact the physician, how to manage daily schedules or what to do when your care recipient becomes overwhelmed.

Consider safety measures for the family member you're caring for. Pack medical items and any items you need to assist your loved one in easy reach. Are there fall hazards in the home - whether it's routine clutter, or scattered toys from the guest. Are there fire hazards such as lit candles? Is a nightlight needed in the hallway? Ask yourself, does it impact my/my patient's safety or does it impact my/my patient's health?

If you feel like travel is not in your or your loved one's best interest this year, you may even decline to travel.

## Hosting Holiday Gatherings

Hosting holiday gatherings can be stressful under normal circumstances. If you are also caregiving in your home, it can bring additional challenges.

### Being aware of your care recipient

Juggling the duties of host this year includes being mindful of a special guest: the person for whom you're caregiving. Whether you are concerned about physical or mental health needs, being aware of the person's needs as you plan activities is key. If your loved one can become overstimulated, lean into having small groups versus large gatherings, and consider having a quieter visiting room for a person as well as a dedicated space where anyone can rest.

Be mindful, too, of schedules that may be impacted by the arrival of guests. Consider wake and sleep schedules, medications and times when your loved one is more alert and positive.

### Having energy for hosting

Remember, not everything needs to be done all at once by you. Create a wish list of things that would help you through the visit, particularly if loved ones are staying for an extended period of time. This may include respite help or small chores. Ask for help in setting up and cleaning up. Have each guest bring a dish, a non-alcoholic drink or dessert. Children can be asked to play games, color with or tell a story to Grandpa. (Feeling stumped on how someone might help? See [A Caregiver's Holiday Wish List](#) for more ideas.)

### Meal planning

Holiday get-togethers need not be a big cooking event. If you are typically the host for holiday meals, consider taking steps to simplify the amount of work you are doing. Options might include:

- Ordering in a meal
- Buying desserts, sides or even the main dish.
- Hosting a potluck
- Holding a lower-key open house, with soup on the stove and salads and rolls for guests.
- Making pizza as a family

- Splitting up favorite holiday dishes among meals throughout the holiday season or during the guests' visits, rather than making "all the sides" one large meal that leaves everyone stuffed.

Other ways to simplify your meals include:

- Using disposable dishes, cups and silverware instead of the fancy dishes that can't go into the dishwasher.
- Simplifying your holiday menu can also help. Consider soups and rolls, lasagna or other easy dishes to minimize food preparation and dishes.
- Having each family member choose the one dish they can't live without, and keep your meal to that.
- Minimize your holiday morning breakfast or brunches. If you're hosting Thanksgiving, have simple cereal and yogurt bar that is easy to clean up. Or consider a heat-and-eat casserole or cereal for Christmas morning.
- Cleaning up from lunch or dinner then serving dessert and coffee.

## Finding activities for the whole family

Plan activities for the best time of day, when the patient is more alert or less agitated. Plan things they enjoy and you enjoy. Pay attention to patient and how they are responding, and be flexible in planning downtime activities during times of rest.

Carve relaxation time into your celebrations. Find a way to ease in quiet time. Some family-friendly relaxation ideas include:

- Have an afternoon coffee or tea
- Play a board game
- Do crafts
- Color
- Have a video call
- Light a fire in the fireplace
- Look at old photo albums
- Make hot chocolate together, whether from scratch or a packet
- Movie night

- Play holiday music, especially classics
- Prepare slice-and-bake cookies
- Read holiday stories
- Watch a funny holiday movie or television special
- Sing carols
- Virtual celebration
- Virtual service
- Watch a video of a school play or concert

More active things to do as a family include:

- Decorate as a family
- Have a cookie exchange
- Volunteer
- Walk to look at houses

# A Caregiver's Holiday Wish List

Don't wait until you're completely overwhelmed to ask for help. Here are some "wish list" ideas to consider asking for this holiday season:

## Respite

- Time to care for yourself, whether it's a massage or facial, or a day fishing or hunting.  
Ask for a night - or weekend - off in the next two to three months.
- If your family members aren't local, ask them to pay for a sitter to assist so you can take some time to rest or do something positive for your physical or mental health.
- Plan a special activity for your loved one receiving care.

## Emotional Support

- Spend time together.
- Have a routine phone call or coffee date.
- Continue to invite and remember you.
- Pray.
- Listen.
- Buy a journal.
- Have video calls with the patient.
- Offer a ride to church or synagogue or a phone call to your clergy.

## Errands

- Take donated items to your local Goodwill or Salvation Army.
- Get an oil change for your car.
- Vacuum or wash the car.
- Take packages to the post office or UPS.
- Return items to the library.
- Pick up groceries or other items from the store.
- Help take children to school or activities.
- Replace items you haven't had time to do.

## Home Help

- Request small home repairs or installation of equipment such as handle bars in the bathroom.
- Arrange for a cleaning service.
- Look for ways to make the home safer, particularly in reducing risks of fires or falls.
- Help decluttering.
- Provide a meal or two you don't have to think about, whether freezer meals, meal delivery service, or a gift card.
- Help with outside chores such as shoveling snow, putting out ice melt, pruning bushes that overhang a handrail, or mowing the lawn.
- Help make phone calls or research support services.

## Reset After The Holidays

After the gifts are unwrapped and the guests have left, it's tempting to simply crash. And stay that way. But the post-holiday blues can quickly settle in. The high of the holiday season is behind you and the slump can take root.

Here are some tips for booting the post-holiday blues:

### Return To Routine

Re-establish your routines at home and work. Aim to go to bed at a set time each night. Introduce or resume your exercise routine, even if it's simply walking around the house for 30 minutes due to weather. Eat healthy meals and snacks. Set a goal of one thing you'd like to accomplish in three to six months.

Work to reset your routines for your patient as well, and give them the sense of consistency they need.

### Refresh Your House

Pack away your holiday decorations, if you got them out. It doesn't have to be before the end of the year. Put them away at your own pace. Toss or donate items that were replaced by holiday gifts. Open your blinds and let the sunshine in.

### Restore Your Optimism

Find a new "project" such as a movie or book you want to check out, or explore new recipes. Connect with others. Practice your faith, meditate or do any stress-relieving activities. Notice the positive things in your life, and share the news. Start a gratitude journal or posting each day.

## Be Mindful

When you're overwhelmed and overloaded with emotion, remember to slow down, breathe, pray, meditate and do what you need to take a break from the moment.

## Log Off

Disconnect from social media when you need to. Watching everyone live life virtually while you're caregiving can bring about feelings of loneliness. Caregivers who use social media more often report feeling alone, according to the AARP. Logging off social media and the stream of photos of others fully living their lives may help improve your mental health.

Likewise, consider a media break from the news.

## Give Yourself Grace

Be kind to yourself. Let go of any negativity or "I didn't" statements. Take small steps to reestablish your habits and achieve any goals. Do your best - and your best is good enough.

## Debrief For Next Year

Take out a notebook or notepad file and write your impressions of your holiday celebrations, particularly if you anticipate still being in a caregiving situation next year. What worked, what didn't? What would you wish you had done earlier or not at all? What could you have used help with? Were visits too long? Too brief? Too early or late in the day? Could anything have been simplified? Jot down impressions of what might help for next year and review them once you start the next year's holiday planning.

## Final Thoughts

If your holidays weren't what you envisioned, be grateful for the blessings that were part of them, no matter how small. Bob Hope once said, "My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: Loving others."

And love is the center of caring for a family member or friend, particularly in their time of need.

Whatever is beautiful, whatever is meaningful, whatever brings happiness, may it be yours this holiday season and throughout the coming year.

# Resources

All sites last reviewed October 2021

## Caregiving

AARP Family Caregiving. (2020, May) Caregiving in the U.S.

<https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states-01-21.pdf>

Alzheimer's Association. (n.d.) 100+ Ways to Support Caregivers.

<https://hdsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/12048.pdf>

American Cancer Society. (n.d. ). Caregiver Resource Guide: Caring for a Loved One With Cancer.

<https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/cancer-control/en/booklets-flyers/american-cancer-society-caregiver-resource-guide.pdf>

American Medical Association. (n.d.) Caregiver self-assessment questionnaire .

[https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/caregiverselfassessment\\_english.pdf](https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/caregiverselfassessment_english.pdf)

American Psychological Association. (2012, Jan. 11). Stress in America: Our Health At Risk.

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2011/final-2011.pdf>

American Psychological Association. (2017, Feb. 9). Taking Care Of You.

<https://www.apa.org/pi/about/publications/caregivers/consumers/taking-care-you>

Brent, Carolyn A. (2021). The Caregiver's Companion: Caring for Your Loved One Medically, Financially and Emotionally While Caring for Yourself. Available at <https://amzn.to/3m5JLCH> (affiliate link)

CDC and National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. (2018) Caregiving for Family and Friends: A Public Health Issue.

<https://www.cdc.gov/aging/agingdata/docs/caregiver-brief-508.pdf>

Meekof, Kristin. (2021, April 8). 5 Tips for Caregivers to Consider. *Psychology Today*.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/widows-guide-healing/202104/5-tips-caregivers-consider>

National Institute on Aging. (2017, May 7). Taking Care of Yourself: Tips for Caregivers.  
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/taking-care-yourself-tips-caregivers>

Painter, Kim. (2021, Oct. 21). How Family Caregivers Can Lighten Their Workload. AARP.  
<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/home-care/info-2021/reduce-caregiver-workload.html>

Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving. (2021, Sept. 28). Working While Caring: Rosalynn Carter Institute Sounds Alarm on Behalf of Employed Family Caregivers  
<https://www.rosalynncarter.org/working-while-caring-rosalynn-carter-institute-sounds-alarm-on-behalf-of-employed-family-caregivers/>

U.S. Office on Women's Health. (2019, June). Caregiver Stress.  
<https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/caregiver-stress>

Westheimer, Ruth K. (2012). Dr. Ruth's Guide for the Alzheimer's Caregiver: How to Care for Your Loved One without Getting Overwhelmed...and without Doing It All Yourself. Available at  
<https://amzn.to/3CfB6DG> (affiliate link)

## Financial Stress

American Psychological Association. (2020, Dec. 3). Dealing with financial stress.  
<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/holiday-money>

Byrnes, Hristina. (2019, Nov. 29). Holiday spending bill: Most of us spend \$1,000 or more on gifts, travel and goodies. *USA Today*.  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/11/29/this-is-how-much-the-average-person-spend-s-on-the-holidays-in-every-state/40688517/>

Feinberg, Lynn Friss, Skufca, Laura. (2020, Dec.) Managing a Paid Job and Family Caregiving Is a Growing Reality. AARP Public Policy Institute.

<https://www.aarp.org/ppi/info-2020/managing-a-paid-job-and-family-caregiving.html>

Hoyt, Bobby. (2020, Nov. 16). Navigating the holidays with COVID-19 affected finances. American Psychological Association.

<https://www.apa.org/members/content/navigating-holidays-covid-19>

Kerr, Nancy. (2021, June 29). Family Caregivers Spend More Than \$7,200 a Year on Out-of-Pocket Costs. AARP.

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/info-2021/high-out-of-pocket-costs.html>

Lowe Cherie. (2014) Keep the Happy in Your Holidays: 21 Ways to Save Time, Money, and Your Sanity This Christmas Season. Available at <https://amzn.to/3n9IScM> (affiliate link)

## Holidays & Mental Health

American Psychological Association. (2006, Dec. 10). Holiday Stress.

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2006/12/holiday-stress.pdf>

American Psychological Association. (2017, Nov. 15). Managing expectations.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/managing-expectations>

CaregiverStress.Com (2018, Dec. 6). Holiday Stress Busters for Family Caregivers.

<https://www.caregiverstress.com/senior-activities/holidays/holiday-stress-for-caregivers>

Davis, Kelly. (n.d.). Looking For Support During The Holidays? Check Out These Free Resources. Mental Health America.

<https://mhanational.org/blog/looking-support-during-holidays-check-out-these-free-resources>

Eckart, Kim. (2020, Dec. 15). How to have holidays 'full of love and connection' and set goals for 2021. *UW News*.

<https://www.washington.edu/news/2020/12/15/how-to-have-holidays-full-of-love-and-connection-and-set-goals-for-2021/>

Fritze, Danielle. (2020.) 5 Things To Do When The Holidays Aren't Exactly Uplifting. Mental Health America. <https://mhanational.org/blog/5-things-do-when-holidays-arent-exactly-uplifting>

Harvard Health. (2021, Aug. 14). Giving thanks can make you happier. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>

James, Matt. (2014, Dec. 14). Create Your Own Meaning for the Holidays. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/focus-forgiveness/201412/create-your-own-meaning-the-holidays>

Keith, Tammy. (2017, Dec. 17). Christmas is 'different' when loved ones have dementia. *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2017/dec/17/christmas-different-when-loved-ones-have-dementia/>

Markiz, Jeremy. (2020, Nov. 24). Finding Meaning While Celebrating Thanksgiving Alone. *JMORE*. <https://jmoreliving.com/2020/11/24/finding-meaning-while-celebrating-thanksgiving-alone/>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). Mourning Holiday Traditions. <https://mhanational.org/mourning-holiday-traditions>

Taibbi, Robert. (2018, Dec. 29). Time For a Holiday Debriefing? *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fixing-families/201812/time-holiday-debriefing>

UniCityHealthCare (n.d.) Helping Your Loved Ones With Alzheimer's Or Dementia Enjoy The Holiday Season. <https://www.unicityhealthcare.com/dementia-and-the-holidays/https://www.ahaparenting.com/read/december-traditions>

Woodruff, Lee. (2019, Dec. 5) Finding Joy While Caregiving During the Holidays. AARP.

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2019/holiday-stress-self-care.html>

## Mental Health

Crane, Kristine. (2014, Sept. 26). The Happiness Racket: When the Pressure to Be Happy Makes You Miserable. *U.S. News & World Report*.

<https://health.usnews.com/health-news/health-wellness/articles/2014/09/26/the-happiness-racket-when-the-pressure-to-be-happy-makes-you-miserable>

Emmons, Robert. (2013). How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times. *Greater Good Magazine*.

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_gratitude\\_can\\_help\\_you\\_through\\_hard\\_times](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times)

Howells, Kerry. (2021, Sept. 29). Is Resentment Stopping You from Feeling Grateful? *Greater Good Magazine*.

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/is\\_resentment\\_stopping\\_you\\_from\\_feeling\\_grateful](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/is_resentment_stopping_you_from_feeling_grateful)

Levine, David. (2017, Sept. 8). Could Pressure to Be Happy Actually Drive Levels of Depression? *U.S. News & World Report*.

<https://health.usnews.com/health-care/patient-advice/articles/2017-09-08/could-pressure-to-be-happy-actually-drive-levels-of-depression>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). 31 Tips to Boost Your Mental Health.

<https://mhanational.org/31-tips-boost-your-mental-health>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). 4Mind4Body: Spirituality and Religion.

<https://mhanational.org/4mind4body-spirituality-and-religion>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). How Stress Hurts. <https://mhanational.org/how-stress-hurts>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). Missing How Things Used To Be.

<https://mhanational.org/missing-how-things-used-be>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). Processing Big Changes.

<https://mhanational.org/processing-big-changes>

Mental Health America. (n.d.). Stress Screener.

<https://mhanational.org/get-involved/stress-screener>

Newman, Kara. (2020, Nov. 25). How to Find Some Gratitude During the Pandemic Holidays.

*Greater Good Magazine.*

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_to\\_find\\_some\\_gratitude\\_during\\_the\\_pandemic\\_holidays](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_find_some_gratitude_during_the_pandemic_holidays)

Suttie, Jill. (2021, Aug. 9). Does Practicing Gratitude Help Your Immune System? *Greater Good Magazine.*

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/does\\_practicing\\_gratitude\\_help\\_your\\_immune\\_system](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/does_practicing_gratitude_help_your_immune_system)

Suttie, Jill. (2021, May 10). Can Practicing Gratitude Boost Nurses' Resilience? *Greater Good Magazine.*

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can\\_practicing\\_gratitude\\_boost\\_nurses\\_resilience](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can_practicing_gratitude_boost_nurses_resilience)

Wei, Marlyn. (2018, Oct. 17). Self-care for the caregiver. *Harvard Health.*

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/self-care-for-the-caregiver-2018101715003>.

## About The Author

Roberta Schneider, MA, is a former journalist for the Kansas City Star who has spent the last two decades writing for medical and healthcare settings. She previously published the book, *Life After Colectomy: A Guide For Families*, available for Amazon Kindle.