



Surviving the Holidays: Strategies for Caregivers

The eight-week stretch between Thanksgiving and New Year's is the most stressful time of year for those caring for elderly relatives or others who can not live on their own. The stress isn't just due to the holiday activities

- shopping for gifts, baking, mailing holiday cards, organizing transportation for holiday expeditions, etc. - that take up additional time and add additional responsibilities to a caregiver's already packed life. It's also due to the fact that holiday time is family time and when family members come together there are a lot of challenges to the caregiver about how they are doing their job *and* the fact that the weather is iffy which makes doing everything more difficult *and* the fact that the work and family schedules and care routines that enable caregivers to keep all the balls in the air are disrupted during the holidays. It's no surprise that caregivers say they feel overwhelmed, out of control and out of patience during the holidays.

Nothing can stop the disruptive impact the holidays have on a caregiver's life but planning for the physical, emotional and fiscal upheaval that come with them can definitely help caregivers survive them. Consider the following strategies for weathering whatever the "festive season" throws your way:

- 1. Make A Holiday To-Do List/Calendar:** Include family gatherings, parties, kids or grandkids' programs, due dates for getting holiday cards and gifts in the mail, getting holiday goodies baked, etc. Decide which activities you should do and which ones you can delegate to others.
- 2. Put Together A Support Network:** Make a list of family, friends, community agencies and service providers and get comfortable delegating.
- 3. Learn To Say "No":** If you don't, you and the person you are caring for will be exhausted you won't be to enjoy things.
- 4. Don't Aim For Perfection:** Be flexible and when you need to, change your expectations to fix a situation. That way, you aren't disappointed or guilt ridden.
- 5. Maintain Your Health:** Don't skip medications or medical appointments; exercise and eat and drink to sustain energy but avoid rich foods, sugar and alcohol.
- 6. Find A De-stressing Mechanism:** Such as deep breathing, mediating, journaling or scrapbooking.
- 7. Don't Forget Immediate Family:** Neglecting them adds to feelings of guilt, so plan time to be "in the moment" with them, to celebrate with them and to participate in activities and traditions just with them.