



Helping caregivers through their journey one step at a time.

10 Tips for Caregivers During the Holidays

By Amy Goyer

For some family caregivers, the holidays can be a joyful time when spirits are lighter. It feels good to care for loved ones and enjoy time together, celebrating with family traditions. But for many, the holidays also bring added stress. Caregivers are already busy, and there's even more to do during the holidays. Something's gotta give! It's OK to give yourself a bit of a break this year.

Here are some tips to help you make it through the holiday season with more joy and less stress.

1. Focus on what is most meaningful

As much as caregivers would like to create the perfect holiday experience, remember that perfection is not the goal — it's really about meaning and [joy](#). There are many factors that can't be controlled when it comes to a loved one's health and abilities, so adjust your view of a "successful" holiday. Talk with your loved ones about what makes the holidays most meaningful for them and for you, and prioritize those holiday activities. Focus on the least amount of things needed to evoke a holiday feeling and create good memories. Your grandmother's tablecloth, the family menorah, a poinsettia or some candles along with holiday music and movies may be enough.

2. Simplify your holiday activities

If going all out for the holidays will push you over the edge, remember that it doesn't have to be all or nothing. If you can't put out all of your decorations, choose a few items that are most significant. You might ask a friend to decorate or pay someone to do so. (My helper, Debbie, a "conciierge," assisted me with holiday decorations many times while I was caregiving for my parents, and it was such a relief!) You can always rearrange decorations once someone else puts them out. If going to all religious services feels like too much, choose the one service that means the most to you. If sending greeting cards is too time-consuming, try sending e-greetings, or just send cards to a few key people this year. Many family caregivers also adjust the location of celebrations or postpone holiday travel to accommodate loved ones in their care.

3. Start new traditions

Instead of focusing on losses and what you and/or your loved ones aren't able to do, try doing something new. If those you care for have trouble getting around, drive through a holiday

light display or watch a holiday concert on TV. If you can't make it to a holiday gathering, have a video chat. Start a home holiday movie night tradition — or watch old home movies and relish the memories. Are your loved ones unable to participate in decorating this year? Turn up the holiday music, invite a friend over to help and make it festive. Your loved ones can be nearby to watch and cheer you on or be surprised by the results.

4. Adjust meals

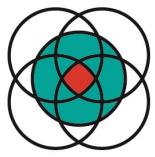
Food is a big part of many holidays, so it's especially difficult to think about changing mealtime traditions. But meals also require a lot of time, money and coordination. Over many years of caregiving, I found doing holiday baking and meals so exhausting that I couldn't even enjoy them. So rather than canceling holiday meals entirely, I've learned to make adjustments like these:

- Simplify the menu. Try fewer side dishes or one dessert instead of three. Focus on the dishes that are traditional and give you that holiday feeling.
- Split up the grocery shopping and cooking among other family members and guests. There's nothing wrong with a potluck.
- Pay someone to cook meals at your house ahead of time or on the holiday.
- Order all or part of your holiday meals to go from a local grocery store or restaurant — either fully cooked or ready for you to cook at home.
- Eat at someone else's home or at a restaurant.

5. Approach gift giving more efficiently

Gift giving is a part of many traditions, but it can be costly and time-consuming. Try shopping online (many online stores will also wrap gifts). You might ask a friend or relative to do your shopping and wrapping for you, or you can always fall back on gift cards. Family caregivers are often financially stressed, so it might be necessary to lower your gift-giving budget this year and scale back the number of presents. Give the gift of time or attention, like scheduling outings or helping with a project. If your family is large, draw names and exchange with just one person. Have a regifting exchange, sharing items you already have. Order a photo gift — like a photo mug, pillow or calendar — or write a meaningful letter that can be enjoyed throughout the year.

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6. Anticipate holiday hot buttons

Are there holiday activities or toxic relatives that trigger stress or unhappy memories? Perhaps feelings of grief or loss overcome you at certain times of day. Do unhelpful relatives arrive for the holidays and **criticize your caregiving**? For some families, lifelong conflicts inevitably flare up at gatherings. It may be best to limit your exposure to — or even avoid — certain places, events, conversations or people. If you can't do that, prepare yourself. Minimize the drama, and don't try to resolve problems over the holidays. Instead, try short encounters and develop quick-exit strategies. Mentally put yourself in a protective bubble, letting negative energy bounce off without hurting, annoying or distressing you.

7. Mind your mindset

Negative thinking activates your body's stress response, so steer your mind to the positives when you start down that slippery slope. Try to **stay mindful**, concentrating on the present moment. Think about what you can accomplish instead of what isn't getting done; celebrate what your loved ones can do, rather than dwelling on what they can no longer participate in; revel in the holiday joys you experience instead of focusing on those you bypass; appreciate the help you are receiving rather than resenting people who aren't supportive.

8. Keep self-care at the top of the list

As caregivers, we give and give and give, and during the holidays we give even more. All that giving can leave you running on empty, with high stress levels or even full-on burnout. Beware of emotional ups and downs, fatigue, foggy thinking and an inability to sit still or the opposite — feeling frozen and unable to get anything done. These red flags must be dealt with, but when we're busy it's easy to let self-care slip just when we need it most. Like our cars, we can't run on an empty, so think about what fills you up and do more of that. Get plenty of good-quality sleep, and keep moving: Walk with loved ones in a decorated shopping mall, or dance to holiday music.

Enjoy holiday goodies in moderation; too many sugary treats can cause an energy crash later. Monitor yourself for unhealthy coping skills, like overeating or drinking too much. Get outside for some mood-elevating vitamin D from sunlight, or consider therapeutic lighting if you suffer from **seasonal affective disorder**. Relax with some holiday-scented aromatherapy to soothe and boost your mood.

9. Connect with other caregivers

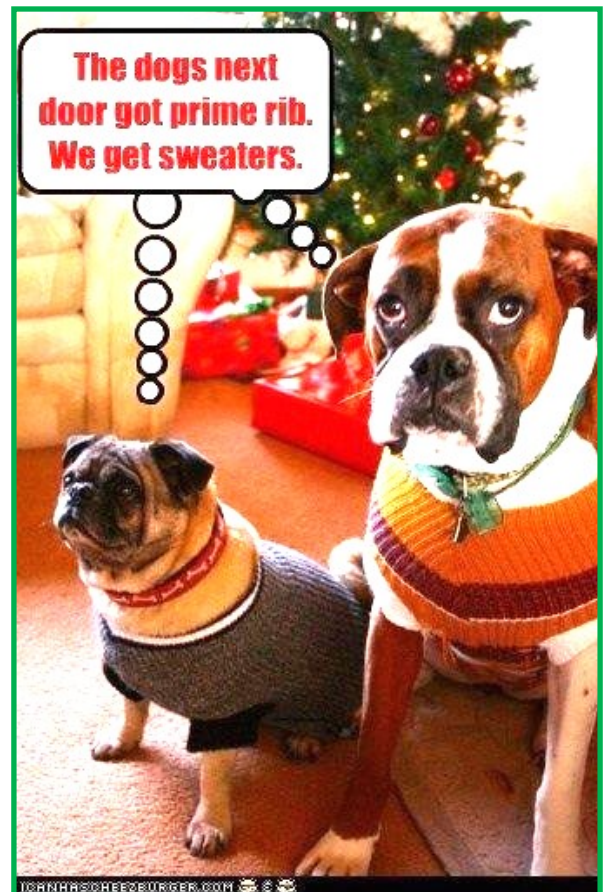
Other caregivers are feeling many of the same emotions you are, even when non-caregivers don't understand. Connect to share your feelings and get tips for holiday survival. If it's difficult to get to an in-person caregiver support group due to health issues, holiday activities or weather try online support groups.

10. Ask for help

Even if you don't normally do so, the holidays are a great time to get some extra help — even a few hours can be a huge relief. Family and friends can lend a hand with holiday preparations. A personal assistant or concierge can complete items on your holiday to-do list or handle personal things like organizing mail or running errands. Hire someone to clean the house or catch up on laundry. To free up your time so you can enjoy holiday activities, **ask family and friends to help with direct care** for your loved ones, or try **community and state resources** like adult day care centers, in-home or facility-based respite care, or paid home health aides/caregivers.

Remember, you'll be happier if you can go with the flow and expect that there will be some delays, a crisis or two and maybe some disappointments. But alongside those things, there can be real joy. Our family spent Christmas in the hospital with Dad one year when he was sick. We made the most of it with decorations and music and festive headgear (hats, headbands, antlers, etc.). The hospital prepared a darn good holiday meal for us too. It was a stressful time, but we also laughed and loved each other and made new memories.

The bottom line is that this time is precious. Even if this holiday season doesn't include all of your family traditions, savor the moments and make new, meaningful memories you can cherish forever.





Winter Vegetable Hash

Recipe by rebeccalovestocook | Updated on November 23, 2022

Prep Time: 15 mins

Cook Time: 35 mins

Total Time: 50 mins



Nutrition Facts

Per serving: 223 calories; total fat 11g ; saturated fat 3g ; cholesterol 10mg ; sodium 76mg ; total carbohydrate 29g ; dietary fiber 4g ; total sugars 4g ; protein 4g ; vitamin c 50mg ; calcium 52mg ; iron 2mg ; potassium 424mg

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 pound Yukon Gold potatoes, diced
- ½ pound fresh shiitake mushrooms, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 small acorn squash, diced
- 1 shallot, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 pinch ground black pepper
- 1 cup chopped kale
- 4 sprigs fresh sage

Directions

Step 1

Place oil and butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Melt butter and mix in potatoes, mushrooms, pepper, squash, and shallot. Season with garlic powder, salt, and pepper.

Cook 25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are tender.

Step 2

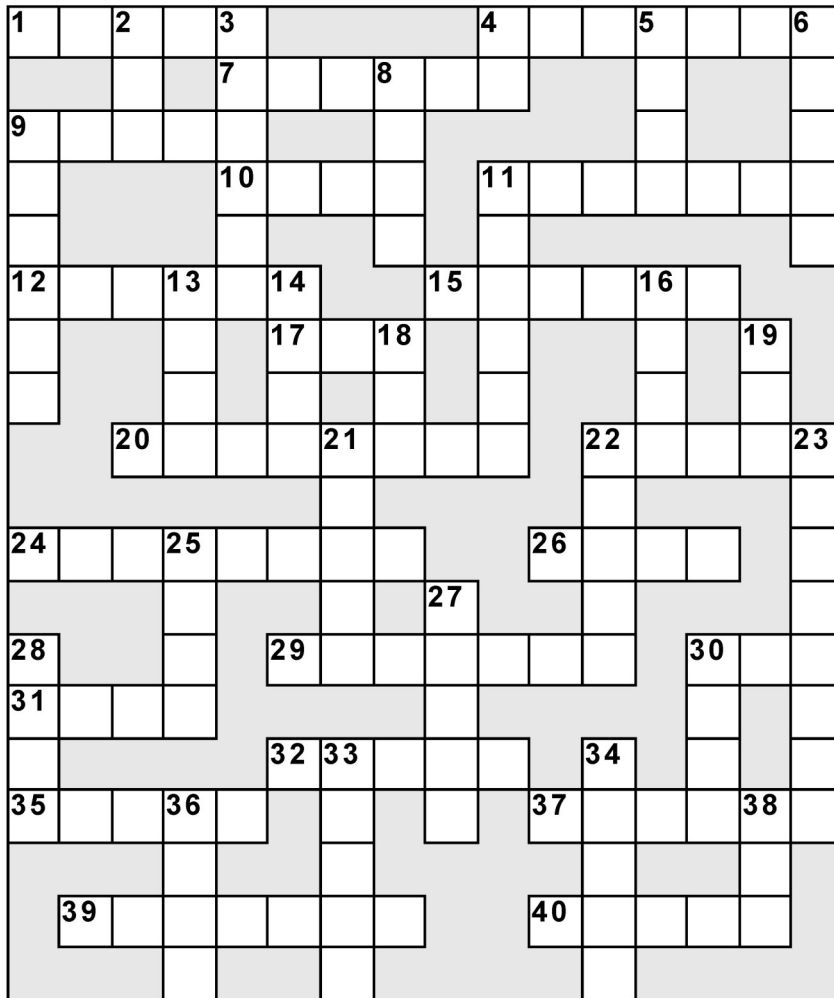
Mix kale and sage into skillet. Continue cooking 5 minutes, until kale is wilted. Serve and enjoy!

Do you have an email address? Want to receive your newsletters electronically? Please submit your email address to me for future correspondence! You can email me at jferril@thrive-alliance.org. Caregivers of Older Adults support groups are currently held the third Thursday of each month at 2:30 p.m. via Zoom. You can also join the first Thursday of every month at 3:30 p.m. via Zoom or live at the Decatur County Hospital. Relative Caregivers support groups are currently being held the second Tuesday of every month at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom. **All support groups are R.S.V.P.**

We also have a Thrive Alliance Caregiver Resources Facebook group. Email me if you would like to be a part of the group: jferril@thrive-alliance.org



Winter Crossword



Down:

- 2. Frozen water
- 3. Small
- 4. Myself
- 5. Small pie
- 6. Neck warmer
- 8. Chilly
- 9. Used to move snow
- 11. A season
- 13. Strong emotion
- 14. Ripped
- 16. Nil
- 18. Bath _____
- 19. Cloud of water vapour
- 21. Last month of winter
- 22. Wooden snow vehicles
- 23. Winter road condition
- 25. Be carried on
- 27. Locomotive
- 28. Carried along by wind
- 30. Piece of hockey equipment
- 33. Make this in the snow
- 34. Winter foot wear
- 36. Faucets can do this
- 38. You hear with this

Across:

- 1. Sudden cold breeze
- 4. Hand warmers
- 7. Hanging spike of ice
- 9. Freezing rain
- 10. Show and _____
- 11. Conditions outside
- 12. Flowering plant, colour
- 15. Achoo
- 17. Not in
- 20. Month of winter
- 22. Carols, etc.
- 24. Valentine month
- 26. Thaw
- 29. Keeps drinks warm
- 30. Small dog
- 31. Winter Olympic sport
- 32. Silky material
- 35. Breezy
- 37. Ice sport
- 39. Foot warmer
- 40. Direct a vehicle's course





Season's Greetings

*May the peace and joy
of the holidays
be with you today
and throughout the new year.*



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Enhancing lives. Building communities.