

Holiday Season: Chaos or Comfort

Planning Guidelines When Caring for Your Family or Friends

You may not be thinking of the festive season yet, but don't leave it too late if you're a family caregiver for Mom, Dad, or your spouse. There's a lot to keep in mind when managing care through the holiday season. Whether they live in residential long-term care or at home, ensuring their comfort while carving out a little time for yourself is essential.

When I think back to when my parents were alive, our last few Christmases together were chaotic, marked by logistical challenges. We were invited to my brother's home for our traditional Christmas Eve dinner. I didn't want to leave out either parent, but they lived in opposite directions across the city, with my brother in yet another area. Picture a pinwheel—we had to plan well in advance.

Build a Support Network

Asking for help can feel daunting. You may not want to impose, or you may be unsure of who to ask or how to ask. Building a support network of friends, family, and available services will pay off when you need help the most.

Supporters/friends and family may vary in what they can offer. Some may only be able to provide an hour or two, while others may be willing to drive to appointments or prepare meals. A larger network allows you to delegate tasks more evenly.

When requesting additional support through the health authority or other providers, allow generous lead time.

Create a To-Do List (For Parents Still Living at Home)

- Call your local health authority intake line to see if your parent qualifies for community home support. Allow a minimum of two months' notice when seeking additional support over the holidays.
- Ask your case manager about respite care for several days or a week.
- Request a referral to an adult daycare centre in your area.
- Ask about volunteer transportation services for medical appointments.
- Look into prepaid taxi-saver tickets or accessible transportation options.

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- Explore volunteer driver support through organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society or the Freemasons.
- Veterans may have additional supports available through Veterans Affairs.
- Consider non-medical companion care from friends, neighbours, church members, or private companies.
- Identify who can assist comfortably with personal care or mobility in tight spaces like bathrooms or crowded living rooms.
- Approach the season with empathy—busy, noisy environments may increase your loved one's anxiety.

Create a Care Home Task List (If Your Parent Lives in Long-Term Care)

- Shop for new clothes or shoes before the season begins.
- Give the care home at least one week's notice to ensure laundry is completed if needed.
- Inform the nurse in advance about the outing time so medications can be prepared.
- Plan grooming needs—showers, haircuts, manicures—either through the home or a private caregiver.
- Pack an emergency bag with underwear, incontinence supplies, clothing changes, socks, and hearing-aid batteries.
- Ensure hearing aids and mobility aids are clean and in good working order.
- Talk to the holiday host in advance about menu plans and seating arrangements to ensure comfort, accessibility, and hearing needs.
- Arrange transportation to and from care homes, keeping in mind they may need to leave earlier due to fatigue.
- Consider the weather and safety from car to doorway.
- Inform the care home of your return time, especially if doors are locked or monitored after hours.
- If hosting at home seems too difficult, consider booking the private dining room at the care home to bring the celebration to them.

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Final Thoughts

Once you're organized, your holiday can be calmer and more enjoyable. Cherish loved ones who have lost their independence. Breathe deeply, appreciate the small moments, and learn to ask for help.

Take-home message: Start planning early. Having someone experienced to assist—whether a family member, friend, or professional—can reduce stress for you and your loved ones and help you all enjoy the season more.