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Holiday Stress Busters for Harried Caregivers



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Kim knew this was probably the last holiday season she would get to spend with her father. His health was declining rapidly, so Kim went over to her parents' house every evening, after work and dropping her daughter off at dance rehearsals, to help out.

She didn't get a chance to even touch her holiday shopping list until December. When her son asked why they hadn't baked his favorite snowball cookies together, she felt about ready to snap. Instead of enjoying the holiday season with her family, Kim spent three months just wishing it were over.

The holidays create a lot of extra to-dos and stress for many people caring for aging loved ones. Instead of letting that stress ruin a time meant to be enjoyed with family and friends, try these stress-busting tips from professionals at the Home Instead Center for Successful Aging.

Be flexible. The holidays are steeped in personal, family and religious traditions. Maintaining those is a lot of responsibility for family caregivers, who are often the adult children of aging parents. Diane K. Hendricks, social worker for the Center for Successful Aging, recommends: "As a family, ask yourself, 'What is important to continue and what can we adapt or let go?'"

Take care of yourself. You hear it every year – don't over-eat during the holidays and keep exercising. That's easier said than done, for sure. Make a concerted effort to schedule time for exercise and keep healthy snacks handy to help avoid sugary holiday treats.

Communicate your needs. Difficult family dynamics can take center stage during the holidays. Conflict may arise if family members can no longer continue their traditional holiday roles. Communicating is the best way to help smooth out problems and avert new ones.

Look for comic relief. Nothing lifts the spirit like a good laugh! Gather friends together for a game night or to watch a funny holiday movie.

Plan ahead. Approach your holiday preparations way in advance. Start making a list long before the season arrives of who can do what so that no one bears the brunt of the work.

Make time for your traditions. Don't let favorite traditions go by the wayside during the busy holiday season. If time or circumstances make them difficult to maintain, adapt them as necessary.

Be resourceful. Don't be a martyr. If someone wants to help, say "yes" to that casserole or offer to run an errand.

Saying "yes" to help can also mean taking advantage of professional in-home senior care services. Learn about five home care services that can help save your sanity this holiday season.

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