

12 Ways for Caregivers to Lessen Holiday Stress: Adjusting Expectations and Culling The To-Do List Can Help

Adapted from article by Amy Goyer from [AARP](#) online

Editor's Note: Use the links in blue font to more information and help.

The holidays can bring great joy, but as many family caregivers can also attest that the season can spur additional pressure. According to a new [AARP survey](#), 7 in 10 family caregivers say it is emotionally stressful to care for loved ones during the holiday season.

Caregivers often have unrealistic expectations for ourselves, striving to create the perfect holiday experience for our loved ones. That's why the vast majority of family caregivers plan to make at least one accommodation during the holidays. Indeed, the survey also found that the average caregiver makes about three to four changes.

Some find someone else to cook or purchase their holiday meal. Some cut back on holiday spending or take on extra work. Many scale back on decorating, while others postpone holiday vacations. And not a small number skip celebrating altogether.

Despite the challenges of caregiving, about one-third of family caregivers actually feel more positive about the holidays since they started caregiving. If you are caring for loved ones try to accept that things are going to be a bit different this year — for both you and your loved ones. But there are steps you can take, both big and small, that can help minimize your holiday stress and maximize your holiday joy.

Here are a dozen ways to adjust your holiday expectations and celebrations:

- 1. Fill your tank first:** We don't expect our cars to run on empty and we can't either. Find quick ways to [fill your own tank](#), like making time for a terrific peppermint mocha or a visit with friends. Or maybe it's a good night's sleep or a day to yourself.
- 2. Line up someone to listen:** It really does help to express our fears, stress and frustration to another. A friend or family member can play this role, or you can contact a local or online [caregiver support group](#).
- 3. Adjust holiday meals:** I've found that purchasing most of the food, making just a few [favorite family recipes](#), takes less time and clean up is a snap. We've also gone out to a restaurant for holiday meals when we need a distraction from grief and stress.
- 4. Cut back on the decorations:** I've scaled back the number of decorations, displaying only the ones that are most meaningful. I've also paid others to help me or invited friends over for a decorating party.
- 5. Be flexible with shopping and gift giving:** Try [shopping online](#) or making a list and asking someone else to do the shopping and/or mail packages for you. Arrange for someone to help loved ones shop if it would make them happy to give you a present too!
- 6. Invite holiday visitors:** Ask family or friends to come over to help lift your spirits and infuse energy. If hosting feels overwhelming, arrange to meet at a coffee shop or cafe or plan a [video chat](#).

7. **Limit the festivities:** Give yourself permission to cut back on your role and the number and location of holiday activities. My Dad was in the [hospital over Christmas](#) one year so we ate, sang and opened presents right there.
8. **Find a travel companion:** Line up someone to drive or ride along and help you out with your loved one. Also plan ahead for the weather, time of day, where to park or unload the car and how to handle stairs and restroom needs.
9. **Get respite:** Even if you don't normally have help caring for your loved ones, this might be a good time to arrange for care for them. You'll have more time to unwind and focus on holiday tasks. Plan fun holiday activities for them so you feel better about leaving.
10. **Start a new tradition:** It's hard to let go of a tradition when loved ones are gone or can't participate, so start a new one. For example, when it became too difficult for my Dad to go to church on Christmas Eve, we began singing carols together at home instead.
11. **Don't forget tomorrow:** We put a lot of energy in the build-up to the holidays, but often forget that we'll need help putting away decorations and cleaning. Also think ahead about support and fun activities to do with loved ones to ward off the [post-holiday blues](#).
12. **Stop, breathe, feel the joy:** It's easy to get caught up in the holiday frenzy. Being mindful of [joyful moments](#) magnifies our precious time with loved ones. Savor them.

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