

Coping with the holidays while caring for a loved one who is sick.

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Coping with the holidays, and in particular Christmas, can be difficult at the best of times. Trying to cope while caring for a loved one who is very sick, makes it even harder. You may be facing the days ahead with dread not knowing how you are going to get through them. Anxiety about events associated with Christmas is often more worrisome than the event itself. It can be a relief when the day finally comes.

Although you cannot change your current situation, you can change the way you approach the holiday season. Being prepared for the holidays is easier when you know how you wish to spend the time and can arrange it that way. Make the holiday as important as you and your loved one wants it. Choose how involved you want to be and make your wishes known to others. If you plan to spend time with family and friends, choose only those you feel comfortable with. When you do take time for yourself you need to feel as relaxed as is possible.

Decide what you want to do this year. When planning how you will spend the holidays think about the traditions which are important to you. Past associations and memories will effect this decision. Ask yourself how important these are to you right now and how much time and energy you have to do them. Decide on how much, if any, you can handle, and modify your traditions accordingly. If shopping is too difficult, try gift certificates, send flowers, catalogue order, or give gifts a miss this year. Elect to do something completely different, if that seems helpful. Pass up writing cards, baking, trimming the tree etc.

Many caregivers find making decisions at times like this very difficult. If you need help in deciding what you want to do rather than should do, try completing the attached [Holiday Checklist](#). Show it to those who will be sharing the holiday with you, so that they are aware of what you want to do. They will have needs too, so hear their ideas. If they wish to add other things, ask them to be responsible for doing them. When you have created your "to do list" share up the jobs between your family and friends, so that they can feel part of the caregiving team. You can always repay them when you feel you have more time and energy to give back.

When making plans remember to include some time for yourself. Set limits for yourself. You will need to take care of yourself in order to maintain the energy necessary for caring for your loved one. Create a new tradition which is rewarding and has meaning for you. Hold a special ceremony, buy flowers for yourself, light a candle, cook your favourite dish. Avoid excessive food and alcohol as this can make you depressed. Look for information or a workshop on how to cope with the holidays.

Above all else be good to yourself. Allow yourself time to think about the holidays and realize that it may have both happy and sad moments. Don't set unrealistic expectations for the holiday season. That way you may find that it works out better than expected. Balance the time you spend with others with some time alone. Both are important. Solitude can refresh you and be a

sort of tonic. It provides you with time and space to think about how well you are doing, given the difficult circumstances right now. It may help to write down all the good things you are doing now for your loved one, rather than dwelling on the future when he or she may not be there to share time with you.

Remind yourself that you don't have to carry the burden of the holidays and caregiving alone. If you find the stress and anxiety too overwhelming, reach out for help. Contact your nurse, physician, clergy, and good friends. Find someone who you trust, and ask them to listen to you. You may not be seeking solutions so much, as wanting someone who will listen without judgment as you express your emotions concerns and fears. Doing this will help you enormously to give the very best possible care to your loved one this holiday season.