

# NORWOOD NEWS

## Op-Ed: Keeping Holiday Cheer for Family Caregivers

November 17, 2017 [Archive](#), [Blog](#), [Health](#), [Latest](#), [News](#), [Opinion](#) [Leave a comment](#)

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Family caregiving can take many forms—from parenting a child with special needs who requires around-the-clock supervision, to caring long-distance for an elderly parent who is alone in the apartment they’ve spent their life living in. According to the [Caregiver Action Network \(CAN\)](#), there are “over 90 million Americans who care for loved ones with chronic conditions, disabilities, disease, or the frailties of old age.” Undeniably this role is deeply rooted in love, and caregivers are happy to help their family members who need it. Still, it is important that family caregivers also acknowledge the added demands caretaking can bring.

The holiday season, approaching fast, can be an especially tricky time for family caregivers. The additional responsibilities of cooking, gift-buying, hosting family and friends—not to mention increased financial burdens and shorter, darker days—often produce anxious feelings. But, with **November being [National Family Caregivers Month](#)** and Thanksgiving and the rest of the holidays almost upon us, it is the perfect time to recognize and honor family caregivers—including yourself—by practicing self-care throughout the season (and beyond)!

As a registered nurse and the leader of [Partners in Care](#), a licensed home care agency affiliated with the **Visiting Nurse Service of New York**, my colleagues and I communicate often with family caregivers while we provide care for their loved ones in their homes. We offer support by helping them navigate the complexities of their role and deal with the stresses that can often come along for the ride. Below are some tips and guidance for all kinds of family caregivers—from the child caring for their parent from afar, to the sibling who is becoming older and frail themselves—that we hope will help you remain at ease when you start to feel tense, and help keep the “cheer” in the holiday season!

### 1. **Do Half of What You’re “Supposed to” Do**

Many times, holiday stress is self-induced. We add items to our to-do list that are not only unnecessary, but are often not even remotely doable. Putting so much pressure on yourself to do everything—filling out cards, making custom place settings, cooking the perfect meal and desserts—could leave you feeling deflated later on. Be attentive to taking on a manageable load and always ask for help if you need it. Ask yourself: is this a *complete necessity*, or would just be a nice addition? If it’s the latter, just cross it off now!

## **2. Do Good**

No matter how often we hear it, doing good really does *feel good*. Helping others will often take your mind off your own troubles and put things into perspective. At the risk of contradicting the guidance above, see if you can squeeze in some time volunteering at a soup kitchen, donating to a food or toy drive, etc. There are many families struggling just as much as you, if not more, and helping them will remind you of the good there is in the world and how help is available if only you are willing to ask.

## **3. Eat Well and Sleep Well**

Taking care of your health should always be the number one priority—especially when you are going through a trying time. If you cannot function mentally or physically, there is no way you can continue to carry on with your duties or enjoy your life. Though sugary and fatty foods—and alcohol—are always especially tempting during this time of year, remember that a harder choice now will result in a more fulfilling outcome later. Keep yourself strong and healthy with proper nutrition and a good night of sleep, especially leading up to the big days.

## **4. Spend Wisely**

On top of the usual medical expenses you may already incur, large meals and gifts can add an extra burden around this time of year. Echoing my first bit of advice, really reflect on what you are purchasing and how necessary it is. Avoid the anxiety and remorse that comes with high credit card bills by pulling back a little on what you buy. Friends and family won't love you any less, *promise*.

## **5. Plan Diversions**

The nostalgia of the holidays can offer a welcome opportunity to tap into the things you used to enjoy. Rekindling connections to past experiences can be beneficial, whether your areas of interest are playing cards, watching a game, listening to music, or dancing a night away. They will also help you take needed breaks, and live in the moment of enjoyment.

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