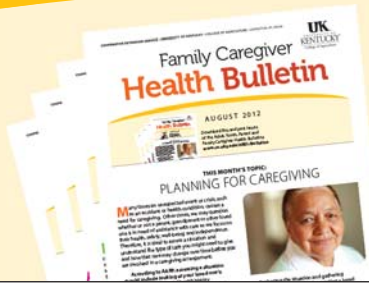


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



DECEMBER 2013

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# HOLIDAY CHEER FOR CARE RECIPIENTS

**T**he holidays can be a time of joy. But for some, the holidays can be met with stress, confusion or feelings of sadness and loneliness. This is especially true for those living alone or who are permanently or temporarily staying in a supportive environment such as a rehabilitation center, group care home or long-term care facility. These feelings can be activated or intensified around the holidays. Celebrations and traditions can be a reminder of loss or of how circumstances have changed due to health or disability. Such loss may include the passing of or separation from a loved one, poor health and decline of independence. These feelings can increase the risk of becoming isolated from friends, family and enjoyable activities, in addition to depression. As a caregiver to someone struggling with the holidays, there are several things you can do to make the holidays brighter and more tolerable.

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# Meeting the social and emotional needs of those to whom you provide care is an important key to caregiving.

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- **Time.** One of the greatest gifts you can give care recipients is time. Make it a point to talk with the people you care about. Listen to their stories, learn from them and try to put yourself in their shoes. Remind the care recipients why and how they are important to you and your entire family. Other times you may read or participate in an activity together. But sometimes it is okay to just sit in silence, as your presence is noted and appreciated.
- **Think outside the box.** Include care recipients in as much holiday celebration as possible. This may include taking the holiday celebration, or at least part of it, to them. If a care recipient typically hosted a party, you can help plan and carry out the event. Or you may decide to throw a holiday celebration in honor of care recipients just to let them know how much they mean to you and others. This can be an uplifting celebration, which also keeps care recipients connected with their friends and community.
- **Purpose.** It is human nature to have a sense of purpose. Yet sometimes it can be challenging to maintain that sense due to disease or disability. Utilize your care recipient's interest and ability to embrace the holidays. This may include direct activities such as decorating, writing cards or wrapping presents, to more hands-off participation including planning menus or consulting about traditions.
- **Open your doors.** Invite a care recipient, especially someone living or spending the holidays alone, over to your house for some of your holiday celebrations and traditions. There

*Upbeat holiday cards with positive updates about life and family can mean a lot to those who are isolated or have experienced loss.*

- are a lot of mental and physical health benefits in the power of meaningful social connections, communication and laughter.
- **Send a card.** Upbeat holiday cards with positive updates about life and family can mean a lot to those who are isolated or have experienced loss. Such cards help care recipients stay connected to the world. Cards can also reinforce the notion of self-worth as it generally feels good when someone remembers you or goes out of their way to do something or say something nice to you. For older adults in particular, it is not uncommon for the number of cards received to decrease, as peers who once wrote may have passed or may no longer be able to write.
  - **Deck the halls.** Help care recipients decorate for the holidays. For those living at home, help hang lights, carry boxes and prepare the house. If a care recipient is living in a facility of some kind, make the holidays brighter by bringing favorite or meaningful decorations. If recipients use a wheelchair, or are confined to a bed, place the decorations in places that will best accommodate their senses.
  - **Encourage.** Encourage care recipients to attend holiday celebrations and events. Social activity and events to look forward to can be meaningful and can contribute to feelings of belonging and well-being.

Meeting the social and emotional needs of those to whom you provide care is an important key to caregiving. Because holidays and special celebrations tend to be associated with memories and various emotions, it is important to recognize that the care recipient may feel different or have different needs during these times.

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Family Caregiver  
**Health Bulletin**

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