

Holidays can be more stressful on caregivers

When many of us think of the month of November, we think of the hustle and bustle of the holidays and how busy we will be for the next couple of months.

We also just celebrated Veterans Day — a time when we reflect on the honor and sacrifices of our military. November is also National Family Caregivers Month and National Alzheimer's Month.

Maybe there is a reason that Family Caregivers and Veterans Day are in the same month. Both caregivers and veterans exemplify the same fighting spirit of those who care and those who serve.

This can be a very stressful time for caregivers, because it is a time when a whole new set of stresses is added to our everyday lives. I noticed that the stores are already selling Thanksgiving turkeys and, of course, all the Christmas decorations are out, even Christmas music is playing.

The word “Thanksgiving” suggests to us that we should be giving thanks, yet many of us may be having a difficult time finding something in our lives to be thankful for.

Sometimes we have to simply be thankful for the memories that we have, even if those who helped build those

memories are no longer with us or can't engage in creating what we consider happy memories.

Even though caregiving can be very rewarding, the stress of the holiday season and all the extra things we feel we must accomplish often overwhelm caregivers.

If caregivers reflect back 10 months ago and think of their New Year's resolutions of taking care of themselves, this holiday season will find us all feeling better at the beginning of the new year.

Start by taking a little bit of time each day just for yourself. Read, take a hot bath, journal your thoughts, or call a friend. And don't forget to ask for help.

If you have family that can help you with respite care for your loved one, or if you have others who can help so you can have a break and take time for you, take it. Reach out to family and friends so that the weight of your responsibility



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Stage**

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can be lifted and shared.

Keep a list of needs handy, so that when help is offered you can be ready with what they can help you with.

You may want to use some of your free time for a few minutes of exercise, even if

it's just a short walk. Exercise helps relieve stress, and you will feel much more relaxed when you return to your caregiving duties.

Remember that this is your holiday too, and you should not be afraid to let family know that you need a little quiet time for yourself.

As a caregiver, having time for yourself is a gift beyond measure. Give yourself the gift of attending a caregiver support group to help you realize that you are not alone, and see how much you can learn from others as well as give back to others in the group.

Let the Sheridan Senior Center help you with your caregiving. We offer a caregiver support group each Monday at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

In addition, our adult Day Break program offers respite for you, and care for your loved one.

Take advantage of our ever-changing and healthy meals served each day at the center — and if you don't feel like cooking this Thanksgiving or Christmas, come join us, and see old friends and meet new friends.

Stress is a part of life, and caregiving can be particularly stressful. We cannot eliminate stress in our lives, but we can learn to recognize and manage it by asking for help.

Have a great holiday season, and please call me if I can help you lessen the stress in your life as a caregiver.

Stella Montano is director of the Family Caregiver Program at the Sheridan Senior Center. Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.