

# Caregiver's Corner Column (December 2013)

## The Caregiver Holiday Guide to Simple Stress Reduction

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By definition, caregivers are under stress on a daily basis. Add the holiday season and it becomes easy for that stress to be overwhelming. Most caregivers know they should reduce their stress, but that is often "easier said than done." Below is a helpful "HOLIDAY" guide with simple stress-reduction ideas for caregivers this holiday season:

**H**-elp

**O**-nline

**L**-ists

**I**-nhale – Exhale - Repeat

**D**-ecide

**A**-ware

**Y**-ou

**S**-tillness

**Help.** Caregivers are used to providing help, not receiving it. During the holiday season, give yourself permission to ask for help and, more importantly, accept help. There are many resources for obtaining assistance. For example, respite care might allow you to decorate your home for the holidays or give you time to grocery shop for Thanksgiving dinner. Getting help can be as easy as asking family members to take on some of your responsibilities. Don't be afraid to ask. Quite often, family members would love to help but don't want an offer to be perceived by you as if you are not "doing a good job." Many helpers may be waiting in the wings for you to ask for help.

**On-line.** Going to the mall anytime from Thanksgiving to December 24 is guaranteed to raise your stress level and that can begin just trying to find a parking space. Since every major retailer has on-line shopping and usually free shipping for the holidays, most of your shopping can be done from the convenience of a sofa, in pajamas, and sipping hot cocoa. On-line shopping allows you to fit shopping into your schedule.

**Lists.** Lists help caregivers stay organized. Disorganization raises stress levels. Keeping lists will help keep track of what needs to be accomplished. Lists can be organized by category, for example, a gift list, or in a timeline fashion. Don't worry if you cannot do everything on the list; it is still very helpful for prioritizing. You will get the most important things done if you write them down.

**Inhale (exhale and repeat).** The power of focused breathing is amazing. Taking a deep breath will relax muscles and relieve tension. Every day, you should dedicate times to inhale, exhale, and repeat.

**Decide.** Decide what is truly important. During the holidays, expectations can be set too high. Some stress can be eliminated when expectations are shifted and set at an attainable level.

**Aware.** Being self-aware, especially during the holidays is difficult. Sometimes caregivers are not aware of how stressful their lives have become until it is too late and they've burned the turkey, yelled at their family or simply found themselves sitting on the floor in a heap crying. Assessing your stress levels will allow you know how much you can deal with each day.

**You.** Take care of yourself first. Just like the instruction before the plane takes off to put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others. If you don't take care of yourself first, you may not be able to take care of others.

**Stillness.** According to Project-Meditation.org, one of the most common contributors to poor health is stress. Everyone experiences it to some degree, but prolonged exposure to high stress levels can actually break down the immune system and hinder the body's ability to maintain a healthy state. Because of this, more and more research is spent finding out about methods to reduce stress. Studies show that being still is a simple and easy way to relieve stress. Just the simple act of sitting in a quiet place with little or no stimulation can help clear your mind, after which, you can return to activities with a renewed freshness.

*Caregiver's Corner* is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.