A Note of Thanks

As we approach the end of another year, we would like express our sincere thanks for the support of the Vanderbilt Child and Family Center and our efforts to bring quality programming and services to the Vanderbilt Community.

We appreciate each of you and look forward to an exciting 2020!

With Joy,

Toya Cobb
Family Services Coordinator
Vanderbilt Child & Family Center
CAREGIVING WHILE WORKING

What to know about employee benefits and the law

AARP, November 2019

About 41 million Americans are serving as caregiver for a loved one, and about 6 in 10 of them are doing so while also trying to earn a living. Many working caregivers report health problems, depression, and lost time and lower productivity at work. If you’re taking care of an aging or ailing family member, you may also find that you have cut back on community involvement and are spending less time with other loved ones and friends. If you are frequently distracted at work, emotionally drained and physically exhausted, consider the following steps to find workplace solutions and build a caregiving support network.

WORKPLACE BENEFITS FOR CAREGIVERS

"We need people to know what their rights are under the law, and we need companies to change their culture, because companies can always be more generous than the law," says Ellen Bravo, the co-director of Family Values @ Work, an organization that advocates for family-friendly workplace policies.

Meet with your manager or human resources representative to discuss the policies and resources available to you. These might include:

- **Flexible work options.** This could mean a compressed workweek or a modified daily schedule based on need. Job-sharing and telecommuting are also caregiver-friendly options to explore. Many employers offer flex-time options on a case-by-case basis, even if there is no formal policy.

- **Counseling and support services.** Your human resources department may offer an Employee Assistance Program or other resources specifically for caregivers, like counseling on reducing stress and managing your time.

- **Eldercare referrals.** Your company may also offer eldercare referrals through an online database or live consultants. This reduces the burden of having to do distracting and time-consuming research to find services such as medical support and meal delivery for your loved one.
- **Share ideas.** Employers that have not implemented policies or practices for employees who are also caregivers may be open to doing so. AARP and Northeast Business Group on Health have developed a tool kit to help employers support their working caregivers. Share it with your employer to help them learn more.

- **Using paid time off for caregiving.** Depending on your employer's policies and applicable state laws, you may be permitted or required to use accrued paid sick days or vacation leave toward time taken off for caregiving. As of October 2019, three states and Puerto Rico had adopted the Eligible Leave for Employee Caregiving Time (ELECT) Act, a model bill developed by AARP that allows workers to use paid sick leave to care for family members. You may also be eligible for unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.

**UNDERSTANDING THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT**

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) entitles certain workers to take unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks per year, without losing job security or health benefits, to care for a spouse, child or parent who has a serious health condition. FMLA does not cover leave taken to care for in-laws.

**Am I eligible for FMLA leave?** Public-sector workers are covered, as are employees of companies and organizations that employ at least 50 people who work within 75 miles of the work site. You must have worked for that employer for at least 1,250 hours in the last 12 months — about 24 hours a week. The U.S. Department of Labor's Family and Medical Leave Act Employee Guide can help you determine your eligibility.

**How do I request FMLA leave?** Notify your employer as soon as possible. If the need for leave is “foreseeable” — for instance, taking time off to care for a loved one after a scheduled surgery — 30 days’ notice is required.

**What can I expect?** Your employer is required by law to tell you your rights under FMLA and, if you qualify, to offer you leave. You may be asked to submit certification paperwork that includes confirmation from a health care provider of your loved one’s condition and need for care. Employers may not threaten you or make your work life difficult because you requested leave.
Do I have to use all 12 weeks consecutively? You may take the 12 weeks of leave all at once or intermittently — for example, three days twice a month when a parent is receiving chemotherapy. Generally speaking, paid time off used for caregiving leave that is also FMLA-eligible counts toward your annual 12-week entitlement.

What about state caregiving laws? As of September 2019, four states offer paid time off for caregivers through family-leave insurance programs. Five other states and the District of Columbia have approved similar legislation that will go into effect between 2020 and 2023. It is your employer's responsibility to comply with all applicable laws, whether your leave qualifies for both state and FMLA leave or just one or the other.

Building a caregiving community

Connecting with other caregivers can help you share resources and talk to those facing the same issues.

- **At work.** Find out if your workplace offers a support group for caregivers, or start one.
- **In your town.** Investigate and participate in your local caregiving community. An adult day care program can provide your loved one with socialization and structure during the day. You may also be able to find people who can cover your caregiving responsibilities if you have to work late (and vice versa), or who can share the cost of a part-time home health aide.
- **At home.** Scheduling and organization apps like Lotsa Helping Hands and CareZone can help you keep track of caregiving responsibilities, including delegating tasks among family members and friends.
- **Online.** Visit the AARP Online Community's Caregiving forums and our Facebook group for family caregivers to share your story, get support and connect with other caregivers.

Editor’s note: This article, originally published in October 2019, has been updated with information from a November 2019 report by the AARP Public Policy Institute on the economic value of family caregiving.
How to Beat Holiday Stress

Whether you're feeling anxious, worried or lonely, we've got tips for bringing back some peace of mind

by Barbara O'Dair

Whether you're looking forward to the holidays or secretly dreading them, chances are there's something about the run-up to the new year that leaves you feeling less than jolly — or that actively ignites anxiety and apprehension.

Maybe you don't trust yourself around the punch bowl, or your wallet is hurting. You may have had words with a family member and fear a challenge ahead at an upcoming get-together. Being alone might be getting you down.

For some, their own expectations are threatening to derail the holiday spirit. “Sometimes you get wrapped up in the rigidities of tradition, and want to create the perfect holiday, finding the right present or perfect holiday card,” says Joanna Scheier, LCSW, and a family and individual therapist in Montclair, N.J. As she says, you can be overwhelmed by impossible standards, and nobody wins.

Understanding what may threaten your merriment is a good place to start. Here, five common problem areas you might already be anxious about, and expert strategies to help you avoid feeling stuffed, sick, broke, burnt out or lonely during the coming season.

If you're stressed that your heart is full, but your wallet is light... "We love to take time at the holidays to send an email reminding our clients that they are, or aren't, on track with their budget,” says Eileen O'Connor, CEO and wealth advisor at Hemington Wealth Management in Falls Church, Virginia, who notes that clients call at the holidays to ask if they can afford everything from a party to a pricey holiday dress to a manicure.
Travel, she notes, is one cost that sneaks up on older clients. Same for donations: You may be inundated with requests for charitable gifts. “Stress comes in with struggling with whether or not you can afford this thing you say you want.

"In her view, “everything is a trade-off,” one that can become a lot clearer if you have a well-defined “savings target.” As in, the yearlong budget shouldn't get thrown out the window in November or December. So ask yourself: Do you know what you can afford to spend on holiday expenses? If you want to go beyond your usual monthly allotment, can you make up the difference in the coming months? How? Figuring out those bigger questions, O'Connor notes, will help you approach your holiday spending with more clarity and, hopefully, reduce the guilt and stress you might otherwise feel over each and every purchase.

If you're feeling particular pressure around giving gifts to family, friends or coworkers, O'Connor recommends first questioning where this pressure is coming from. “We make up things in our mind such as so-and-so needs a gift,” she says. Rather than give in to every gift-giving whim (from internal or outside pressure), she recommends setting guidelines for things like family giving. Her extended family, for instance, employs a no-gift rule, following the assumption that “No one needs more stuff or wants it.” Another approach is to only give gifts to children. If you're throwing a big party, consider if that can be your present to others. “It's expensive!” she says.

When considering what to give friends or coworkers, know that “data has shown that if you make someone feel appreciated, that means more than a gift itself.” If you decide you want to purchase items for everyone on the list, head to the store with a dollar limit for each gift to cut down on some budgetary anxiety.

If you're worried you'll pay for all those extra calories well into the new year... "There's a motif of consumption over the holidays,” says Scheier. It's a time when food magically appears at every turn and you may very well be moved to eat everything in sight. To make it through with less stress, build up your defenses to unnecessary calories — and lose the guilt about saying no to things you don't especially like, or to not finishing your plate if you've had enough.
Brooklyn-based Frances Largeman-Roth, RDN, nutrition expert and author of Eating in Color, says that her number one defensive eating strategy for party season is “don't arrive hungry” to a holiday event, and don't skip meals leading up to it. “Enjoy the food but don't go in ravenous,” she advises.

Before you go to a party, Largeman-Roth advises, have a fiber and protein snack, such as an apple with a cheese stick, or nut butter or avocado on toast. “Having a snack beforehand helps you put the brakes on later,” she says. She also advises not positioning yourself at the buffet table, to lessen the chances of “food amnesia” (you may graze and forget to keep track of what you put in your mouth). Allow yourself to have half-portions of things as well.

Otherwise, stand firm, and know that you don't need to eat to please anyone but yourself. Try what looks irresistible at the buffet, and pass on the rest. If hosts urge seconds or a surplus of treats on you, say you're stuffed but you'll take a goodie bag home, says Largeman-Roth. “What you do with that later is up to you,” she says.

At a time when food gifts are prevalent, also think about unloading any that tempt you to overeat on a school, shelter or neighbor. And try modeling healthy eating by giving citrus items or healthy nuts as gifts instead of lots of sugar.

**If you're realizing the holidays tend to turn into the most inebriated time of the year...** Consider an alcohol plan. “The stress levels at the holidays make it easy to run into trouble with drinking,” says psychologist Mark Edison, clinical instructor in psychiatry and medicine specializing in alcohol misuse at Mount Sinai Health System in New York. “So rather than drinking whatever someone puts into your hand, plan what you're going to drink — and how many drinks — before you start celebrating.”

Edison suggests keeping a drinking diary ahead of the festivities so that you're in touch with your behavior, and have a firm grasp on how many drinks you can handle. “Include what you drink and when, who you're with, and your feelings and thoughts before, during and after drinking. After two to four weeks, you'll get a good picture."
"Many people drink too fast during the holidays because alcohol is so good at calming holiday nerves,” says Edison. Some rules of thumb:

- Know before you go how your medications interact with alcohol.
- Don't have more than one drink per hour.
- Change the kind of alcohol you drink, such as beer instead of hard liquor.
- Have a full glass of water after every alcoholic drink.

If you want to abstain or at least temper your intake but also want to avoid attention, make or order a drink without alcohol and keep it in your hand the whole time. “Luckily,” Edison says, “the vast majority of people don't care what you're doing. It's relatively rare that someone pushes you to have a drink."

"A glass of soda water with lime will give the look and feel of an alcoholic beverage,” adds Eric Ascher, DO, a family medicine physician at Lenox Hill Hospital, “and amid seasonal conversations with cup in hand, you will not realize the absence of alcohol.”

You can also water down your drinks. “If you choose wine for the night, add low calorie soda or soda water to dilute the drink and make it last longer,” Ascher recommends. “Adding extra ice to all of your beverages will have the same effect."

**If you're feeling too overwhelmed by social or family obligations to actually look forward to them...** This time of year, it’s easy to feel inundated by social obligations. “While extroverts might find a lot of parties energizing, other people may find them taxing,” Scheier says.

Plan ahead and keep your expectations in check. “You might try to expand your social experience at this time of year,” Scheier says, “but it's also OK to have boundaries.”

- Think through your personal party limits. There's nothing wrong with weighing your commitments against your sleep schedule or deciding to make short appearances. Sending your regrets to some invites early is not only polite, it can remove some weight from your shoulders.
• Ask yourself, if you go lighter on the drinking, will all the parties feel a lot more manageable?
• For peace of mind, consider balancing social obligations with dedicated “me time” in your calendar, either in the middle of a busy season or at the end, as a reward.
• If you have a partner, share your apprehension about something like the upcoming office party, and see if you can work together to make things easier. Maybe you make a deal to leave by a certain hour, to check in regularly with each other, or to take two cars in case you want to make an earlier exit.

If you're simply feeling lonely... One recent report found that 46 percent of Americans feel lonely on a regular basis. And according to a study for the American Psychological Association, 26 percent of adults feel particularly lonely over the holidays. While you can certainly feel isolated in a crowded room, plenty of people feel that way because they're — well — alone. For those who are divorced or widowed or are an empty-nester, the holidays can have all kinds of mental health triggers.

One easy fix? Consider activities that help you do good. Science has shown that those who give back experience not only mental health benefits but physical benefits, too. “Put yourself out there,” Scheier advises. This year, a study published in the Journals of Gerontology found that widowed people who volunteered for two hours a week or more felt less intense loneliness. You can learn about volunteer opportunities — at shelters, food pantries, children's hospitals, animal rescue centers and more — through your place of worship or local listings.

If you're light on company for a particular holiday, try to fill the days around it. Reach out to an old pal or invite someone simply to have a coffee or attend a reading at the library. Get involved in a community project. And don't hold back from asking what others are up to themselves; you never know when someone else might appreciate some comaraderie around the holidays.
Helping a Loved One With Dementia at Family Gatherings

Here are suggestions for engaging with him or her during family events

by Patricia Corrigan

Part of the Transforming Life as We Age Special Report

In many families, holiday or other event gatherings are a collaborative effort. Someone brings the main dish, someone else brings a salad and another person shows up with dessert.

Maybe it’s time, experts say, to assign one dinner guest to keep an eye on your family member who has Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia. Otherwise, that relative may end up sitting alone, staring into the distance, as others mingle after the meal.

“Most people with early or middle-stage Alzheimer’s enjoy being social, and many would enjoy eating a holiday dinner with the family,” says Dr. Suzanne Schindler, a neurologist and a professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.
CONSIDER WHAT THE PERSON WITH DEMENTIA WOULD ENJOY

When planning the event, Schindler says, it’s important to take these individuals’ needs and wants into consideration. What would they like? What would make them happy? Maybe your mom likes to dance. Encourage the younger children to ask her to dance for a bit. Does your dad enjoy singing? A family sing-along after dinner may be in order.

“You want the person to be engaged, but not too much or too little.”

Someone with mobility issues may prefer to visit quietly with one person at a time, reminiscing about previous holidays. A family photo album may spark that conversation. Sometimes, just sitting together, observing others at the gathering, may be enough.

“You want the person to be engaged, but not too much or too little,” Schindler says. Too little might be seating the person at the back of a room. Too much might be seating the person in the middle of a noisy crowd or in the path of active children.

What topics should be avoided? Current events may be troubling for someone with short-term memory loss. Schindler also cautions against correcting those with dementia, who may say things that are inaccurate, or calling them out for being repetitious. She recommends avoiding any confrontations.

DON’T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ALZHEIMER’S

An estimated 5.7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s. Yet, many people still are not well informed about this debilitating disease, for which there is no cure. Simply acknowledging that a family member has Alzheimer’s often is emotionally difficult for many people. Beyond sadness, some experience fears that they, too, may develop the disease, though experts say that age is a far greater risk factor than genetics.
Consider holding the gathering at brunch or lunch, because some people with dementia experience fatigue or confusion later in the day. Interact directly with the person, rather than his or her caretaker, at the event. Be a good and patient listener, because some people may need longer to formulate their responses to questions. Invite the person to participate in a non-stressful way, perhaps by helping set the table or fold napkins, depending on his or her level of function. Provide a quiet place where the person can spend some down time if needed.

Monica Moreno, senior director of care and support for the Alzheimer’s Association, endorses Schindler’s suggestion that before families gather, they talk openly about a loved one’s level of disease, what to expect and how they can help.

“Many people hear the word ‘Alzheimer’s’ and they think of someone who can’t communicate or doesn’t know what’s happening around them,’ Moreno says. “That’s not always the case. Alzheimer’s affects everyone differently, and that’s why we shouldn’t make assumptions.”

**Moreno offers these general tips:**
- Consider holding the gathering at brunch or lunch, because some people with dementia experience fatigue or confusion later in the day.
- Interact directly with the person, rather than his or her caretaker, at the event.
- Be a good and patient listener, because some people may need longer to formulate their responses to questions.
- Invite the person to participate in a non-stressful way, perhaps by helping set the table or fold napkins, depending on his or her level of function.
- Provide a quiet place where the person can spend some down time if needed.

Moreno also recommends keeping your sense of humor, which lightens the mood for everyone and can ease communications. And keep in mind that a specific tip or strategy that doesn’t work one day may well work the next.


**TRY TO INTERPRET UNEXPECTED BEHAVIORS**

If your loved one with dementia becomes distressed during a gathering, Moreno recommends trying to redirect him or her. “Change the topic … or invite someone else to join your conversation,” she says. If that doesn’t work, try to understand any behaviors you may witness, because all behaviors are a form of communication.
“A person may try to get up and leave. By doing this, what is he or she saying? Perhaps they need a drink or to go to the bathroom, or perhaps they feel anxious or over-stimulated because the noise level is too loud. It’s helpful to know what triggers may bring on different behaviors,” Moreno says.

And if things get out of control, the Alzheimer’s Association has a Helpline staffed by clinicians who can offer support all day, every day. The number is 800-272-3900.

**HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AS CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE**

As a person’s dementia progresses, his or her ability to interact with other people will change as well. The family will have to adjust to that, and there might come a time when a big gathering is just too much for a loved one with dementia.

For example, my friend Elizabeth wasn’t at her family’s Thanksgiving dinner this year. I wrote about her two years ago when at 68, she was the youngest person living in a memory care unit after a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s. Now she is in a skilled nursing unit, and Michael, her husband, tells me it’s not easy to keep Elizabeth engaged when he visits every day.

“Elizabeth will not initiate any conversation, and it’s often difficult to even get a reaction to what I say,” Michael says. “We almost always go for a walk on the grounds. We look at the trees and the beautiful fall leaves, and I talk about them. That always provides a good distraction.”

Elizabeth’s and Michael’s family gatherings have always been large. They have three children with families of their own, plus Elizabeth has eight living siblings and Michael has two, all with families. “I don’t bring Elizabeth home for the holidays,” he says. “The crowd would be too much.”

*Patricia Corrigan is a professional journalist, with decades of experience as a reporter and columnist at a metropolitan daily newspaper, and a book author. She now enjoys a lively freelance career, writing for numerous print and on-line publications. Read more from Patricia on her blog.*
UPCOMING EVENTS

Caregiver Appreciation Celebration
Wednesday, December 4th
12 - 1 PM
The Living Room, Godchaux Nursing Annex

Navigating School Choice
Hosted by The Margaret Cuninggim Women’s Center
Speaker: Jenai Hayes, Metro Nashville Public Schools.
December 12, 2019, 12:00 PM
Buttrick Hall 123
Lunch will be served on a first-come basis.

NEW LOCATION: E. Bronson Ingram College, Dining Hall
NEW DAY: Friday, Dec 20th
NEW TIME: 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Present your gold VU ID with iclass symbol to receive your choice of:
Turkey • Tofurky • Mug Set
VU Tote Bag • Bamboo Utensils
(while supplies last)

Caregiver Support Group
January 8, 2020
12:00-1:00 PM
The Living Room
Godchaux Nursing Annex