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# Be kind to yourself during the holidays

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DECEMBER 17, 2017 05:26 PM

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Older and  
**WISER**  
Margaret Coates



Many of us get stressed during the holidays.

There are the extra events to attend or plan, the turkey dinner with all its extra trimmings to get ready, the baking of the holiday goodies, decorating the house and putting up the lights, the presents to buy, the extra crush of traffic as people get to the stores, the extra food and drink to be consumed, and dealing with the stretched budget.

For seniors, though, there can also be added stress due to aging.

Seniors can experience stress from loneliness, changes in diet and routines, changes in mobility, changes in their lives such as a loss of a spouse and issues around end of life.

You may notice that you or your loved one is experiencing stress because there are noticeable changes in eating habits (although it's hard to tell with all the wonderful, fattening and delicious food around at this time of year).

You might also notice sudden weight loss or gain, poor sleep, increased irritability and fatigue and weepiness.

Seniors at this time of year might be lonelier as they don't have the usual distractions and routines to cope with being alone – seniors' centres are open less often (although they do their best to accommodate seniors), friends might be less available or out of town visiting family, and events may be harder to get to because of mobility issues.

Some seniors also can't visit far away family as travel becomes difficult as one ages.

Some seniors may also be coping with the recent loss of a loved one who they had shared many of the Christmas traditions.

Care facilities do their best at this time of year to provide special events, but these are sometimes not a substitute for family visits.

Seniors may be experiencing some feelings about their end of life, that this might be last of the holidays for them.

At this time of year many of us want to send cards, buy gifts and attend events.

However, some seniors may be experiencing age related issues such as arthritis and mobility issues.

Cards could be difficult to write if your hand is somewhat immobilized or crippled with pain. Shopping for gifts requires getting around to stores and some may not be able to drive or get around on public transit.

There are good coping strategies for everyone at this busy time. Plan your time, if there are too many events, don't be afraid to say no to some of these. Maybe let your daughter or son cook the turkey dinner.

Plan a realistic budget and stick to it – no one wants to pay all year for the excesses of this season. Make sure you set a regular routine for sleep. Try to stick to good eating habits and when tempted remember the maxim “moderation is best.”

Scan all the cookies on the tray, but choose a favourite or two. Don't forget your exercise program – it may be harder to keep this up with time pressures, but it's still vital in keeping you less stressed.

If you are a mobile senior perhaps reach out to a friend or friends who might be sharing your loneliness at this time of year and invite them over or organize to take a taxi together to a concert or holiday gathering.

You could also volunteer a bit more which will get you socially connected and out of your own space.

Assisting a senior at this time of year could be your gift to them. When you've finished putting up your lights, perhaps help a senior in your neighbourhood or a loved one put up theirs.

Visiting a senior in a care facility is vital as well. Care givers, who are often carrying an extra burden at this time of year, may need some extra support. Invite a senior who may be alone at this time of year over for dinner or lunch. Social connectedness is key to the well-being of a senior.

Self-care could be the gift you give to yourself. Try to take a few moments for yourself, take a nap or a bath, and be thoughtful about what the season is about.

Be kind to yourself. If you're having mobility issues, let the after dinner gang go out for a walk or do the cleanup without you, and let people assist you with the traditions you might need to let go, such as baking for the family.

It's not too late for new holiday traditions.

Happy holidays everyone!

*Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 47 years and has worked for and with seniors for 20 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome Email: lions\_veiw@telus.net.*

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