

Caring at Christmas

If you have a loved one at home your caring responsibilities are tiring at the best of times. Christmas can become very stressful. It really is important that you don't try and take on too much! You do have to be realistic about what you can do and what is going to be in your own and your loved one's best interest.

In the run up to Christmas, try and start planning early, so you don't have to do everything in a rush at the last minute. If you find it hard to get to the shops, family won't mind vouchers. My family all write their present wish list on Amazon so it is easy for people to buy them something they want without trying to think of things, or trail round the shops. Even if you don't like internet shopping, asking family to give you ideas of what to buy can be helpful. I leave the Christmas cards by my bed and write a few every night so it isn't a big task.

If you are used to hosting big family gatherings, ask another member of the family to take this on. It will be difficult if you have been used to having everyone come to you and you have enjoyed the planning and preparation for Christmas. But if your loved one is going to find a lot of people difficult to cope with and you have to spend time attending to the needs of your loved one then you will be too tired and stressed to cope with it, or more importantly enjoy it.

If you do decide you want to have family for Christmas, then make sure you take all the help you can get. Don't be afraid to ask. Generally, people are only too pleased to help. Even before my husband was ill my family would all help with the preparations, my dad would come and prepare the veg the night before; my mum always took responsibility for buying and making the stuffing and sausages. My sister brought the crackers and sweets and a silly game to amuse the children. My job was always cooking the dinner and then I was expected to sit down and leave others to clear and wash up.

Christmas tea does not have to be a grand affair. I have always kept it simple; a selection of cheeses, crackers and pickles with Christmas cake and some fancy chocolate biscuits is enough. Even if you have been used to making and baking, no one will expect you to, so take short cuts where you can and buy things ready prepared.

If your loved one is going to get tired, suggest a rest on the bed for an hour or send the younger and more energetic out for a walk after lunch so those that need it can have some peace and quiet.

If you can't cope with all the family at once, why not suggest that they come on different days over Christmas? Then you don't have to cater for a lot of people at once. Make a simple casserole for Christmas Eve, Boxing Day is easy with leftover turkey and pickles with jacket potatoes. Or get everyone to bring something - ask someone to bring the main course, another the veg and someone else pudding. If you share it out it is not a big task for anyone.

The important thing is being with the people you love and not wearing yourself out in the kitchen and then needing days to recover.