

Practical Gifts for Caregivers

By Angus Campbell

It's that time of year again when many of us are preparing for the holidays. Do you have a family/friend caregiver on your gift list but you don't know what to get them? Perhaps you are a caregiver and are not looking forward to the holidays? I have some suggestions.

Each caregiving situation is unique, but there are common themes. Lack of time, energy, money, and not recognizing when to ask for help are frequent refrains I hear.

I was talking with my colleague Shelly in Winnipeg, and she reminded me how caregivers need to allow their families, friends, and neighbours to help. Almost everyone understands (or should) that caregivers face daily challenges; people want to help, but they often don't know how.

So what are the kinds of thoughtful gifts that might bring caregivers joy?

Practical gifts of your time can be low-cost and could include preparing meals (especially ones that can be frozen and reheated), baking seasonal goodies, offering to run errands, shopping, shovelling the driveway, doing yard work, chauffeuring, or providing respite. Caregivers need respite time to recharge, but they cannot relax unless they know that their loved one is in good hands.

If you are financially able, you might consider having a weekly meal delivered or pay for a mobile service to cut hair, or massage therapy. How about a day at a spa or maybe a night out together to a sporting event?

Gift cards can be welcome when they are purchased for restaurants, retail, or services that the caregiver needs, wants, and is able to access. Some people love gift certificates to grocery stores, drug stores, online purchases, and the like. Don't forget about a home cleaning or repair service.

Caregivers often report feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and in need of support. They may feel they are being pulled in many directions, especially if they are also working. It is important to consider that the caregiver not host the family holiday meal, even if she or he have been doing so for many, many years. If the celebration cannot be held at another family or friend's home, then make it a pot luck and ensure that someone arrives extra early to help set up and someone stays to clean up.

Holidays can be especially stressful for caregivers, so I would like to share a lesson I just learned about trees – every year they show us their beauty by letting things go. At this time of year some of us may need to do the same.

I wish you all the very best for 2018. Please do not hesitate to contact Caregivers Nova Scotia toll-free at 1.877.488.7390 or www.CaregiversNS.org

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