

Caregivers feeling the strain this tough holiday season

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(HealthDay)—The coronavirus pandemic makes the holidays even more

difficult for caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia, an expert says.

"Even in the best of times, holidays can be a mixed bag for families who are caring for a loved one with an age-related illness that causes physical and mental changes. Focus on family togetherness and joy," said Mary Catherine Lundquist, program director of Care2Caregivers, a peer counseling helpline for caregivers of people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The helpline is operated by Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care in New Jersey.

"People dealing with significant illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease may be experiencing other feelings, such as sadness, worry and even exhaustion. Sometimes the best gift we can give to each other is to be present," Lundquist advised in a Rutgers news release.

With travel frowned upon because of the pandemic, it may not be possible to see your relatives in person. But you can still reach out. "Check in with your elderly family members, especially those who are caregivers. Ask them how they are doing and then really listen. Be nonjudgmental and acknowledge what they are sharing," she suggested.

"Listen for what they really need, not for what you think they need—and then offer it," Lundquist said. "Dropping off groceries, fixing a broken fence post, calling a few times a week to just chat may be the best gifts. Writing a letter telling them what you mean to them and how they have impacted your life is a wonderful gift they can read again and again."

Lundquist also offered advice on helping people who have a loved one in a nursing home or who lost a loved one this year.

"Call them to check in, send a handwritten note, drop off flowers or send a text to say 'thinking of you,' which can help ease loneliness and [social isolation](#). Let them know that just because their loved one is not in the house with them anymore, they are not forgotten," she said.

Even if you can't see people in person, connect with them over the phone, by text or through [social media](#), Lundquist suggested.

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians offers advice on [caregiver health and wellness](#).

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