CareLines

2025 November-December Newsletter

Staying Engaged this Winter Season

An update from Tia Drumm, Caregiver Programs Coordinator

When we hear winter, we automatically get out our winter hats, coats, boots and hunker down, but what if we got out our creative side along with them and hunkered around instead?! In the winter it can be easy to "shut down" and withdraw from recently frequented activities or think that no activities are going on, but there could be a few gems thrown into the world at that time, too.

Here are a few ways to stay engaged:

- Look at your local library or senior center event calendar. Libraries have programming for ALL ages, and senior centers are a great place to connect with others, play games and converse.
- Memory Cafés are events for a person living with dementia and their care partners to attend together to complete a craft, eat lunch, or simply visit with others on the same journey. (RSVP is required; register online on LifeStream's event calendar!)
- Support Groups are monthly offerings to caregivers of someone living with ANY diagnosis. These are available in various counties throughout our service area and do not require an RSVP.
- Check your local YMCA, gym, or community center. These sites can have programming for all ages. A Silver Sneakers class might be a great way to get your body moving and meet others
- LifeStream Meal Sites provide more than just a meal! It is an opportunity to be active and engaged in the community. (Find a Meal Site on LifeStream's Nutrition page; these are listed by county!)

Here are a few tips to keep you mentally engaged:

- Complete a puzzle: Doing a puzzle keeps your brain thinking and moving – even if you're not!
- Learn a new skill, language, or hobby: Pick up that hobby you have been thinking about!
- Call a friend and chat: Remember, WE ALL have things we are stressing over, especially during the holiday season! If your friend hasn't called you, DON'T TAKE IT PERSONAL – pick up the phone and check on them!

STEP in

LIFESTREAM CAREGIVER PROGRAMS

Preventive Care and Seasonal Shots for Healthy Aging

An update from Kelly Smith, Dementia Outreach Specialist

As winter settles in, it's easy to focus on cozy blankets and warm meals and the holidays ahead, but it's also one of the most important times of year to prioritize preventive care. For older adults especially, the colder months can bring a higher risk of illness and slower recovery from seasonal infections. Taking a few proactive steps now can go a long way toward keeping you healthy, strong, and protected all winter long.

1. Schedule Your Annual Wellness Visit

Before the year ends, make sure you've scheduled your annual wellness visit with your healthcare provider. These routine checkups are designed to help catch potential issues early from heart health and blood pressure to cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Your provider can review any medications, recommend helpful lifestyle adjustments, and discuss preventive screenings tailored to your age and medical history.

For older adults, Medicare covers an annual wellness visit at no cost, so it's a great opportunity to stay on top of your health and update your care plan before winter illnesses peak.

2. Stay Up to Date on Screenings

Preventive screenings are a key part of healthy aging. Tests such as mammograms, colon cancer screenings, bone density scans, and vision or hearing checks can help detect problems early, when treatment is most effective. Winter is an ideal time to get these done, especially if you've been putting them off during the busy summer months. Even simple screenings like blood pressure checks or weight monitoring can help your doctor spot changes before they become serious concerns.

3. Protect Yourself with Seasonal Vaccines

Each winter, viruses like influenza, COVID-19, and RSV become more active, leading to an increase in hospitalizations among older adults. Fortunately, vaccines can dramatically reduce your risk of serious illness.

- *Flu shot:* Recommended for everyone over 6 months old, but especially important for adults 65 and older. The flu shot changes each year to match the most common circulating strains.
- *COVID-19 booster:* Staying up to date helps protect against new variants and provides ongoing protection during the winter surge.
- *RSV vaccine:* Newly available for older adults, this vaccine can prevent severe respiratory illness in people 60 and up.

Ask your healthcare provider or local pharmacy which vaccines are right for you. Many can be given at the same visit for convenience. Most insurance plans, including Medicare, cover these vaccinations at no cost.

4. Build a Preventive Routine

Healthy aging isn't just about treatment — it's about prevention. Keep a simple winter wellness checklist:

Schedule your annual checkup

Get your recommended vaccines

Review medications and supplements

Update your emergency contact list and medical information

These small actions create a strong foundation for a healthier, more confident season.

Preventive care and seasonal vaccinations are powerful tools for staying healthy and well throughout the holidays and winter. By taking action now, before flu and cold season reach full swing you can protect your health, maintain your independence, and enjoy the holidays and months ahead with peace of mind.

Including a Loved One with Dementia During the Holidays

An update from Rachel Gray, Care Coach

The holiday season can be a time of joy, family, and tradition, but for families of someone living with dementia, it can also bring unique challenges. With thoughtful planning, the holidays can still be a time of connection and warmth for everyone, including your loved one with dementia.

Keep It Simple And Flexible- Large gatherings, loud music, or fast-paced activities may cause confusion or agitation. Instead, opt for smaller gatherings in familiar settings. Limit decorations that may be overwhelming (blinking lights, cluttered surfaces), and try to keep a consistent routine around meals and rest. Familiarity helps reduce anxiety and supports orientation.

How to Include Your Loved One- Involving your loved one in activities, even in small ways, can help them feel valued and connected. Invite them to help stir cookie dough, fold napkins, listen to holiday music, or look through photo albums. Focus on sensory experiences: the scent of cinnamon, the warmth of a fuzzy blanket, or the rhythm of a classic holiday song can spark comfort and even memories.

Connecting Through Presence, Not Perfection- Dementia often impacts memory and language, but connection doesn't require perfect recall or conversation. Make eye contact. Use simple, clear sentences. Smile, hold their hand, and speak with warmth. If they repeat a story or forget details, meet them where they are, correction isn't as important as emotional reassurance.

When Stress Arises: Redirection and Reassurance- If your loved one becomes agitated or confused, try redirecting gently: "Let's go sit by the tree," or "Would you help me with this ribbon?" Keep your tone calm and positive. Avoid arguing or correcting, instead, validate their feelings and offer comfort. Often, a quiet room or short walk can reset the moment.

Educate and Prepare the Family- Before gatherings, it's helpful to speak with other guests about what your loved one is experiencing. Let them know it's okay if Grandma doesn't remember names, or if Dad repeats himself. Encourage patience, and emphasize that their presence and kindness are more valuable than perfect conversation.

The Heart of the Holidays- Ultimately, the holidays are about connection and love, not elaborate meals or busy schedules. By focusing on what brings calm, comfort, and joy to your loved one with dementia, you create meaningful moments that benefit the whole family. Simple activities, quiet companionship, and shared smiles can become the most treasured traditions of all.

Empowering Immunity and Brain Health

An update from Kellie Magoon, Care Coach

Caring for someone with dementia can be exhausting, leaving caregivers prone to stress-induced immune suppression, while patients face heightened infection risks and cognitive decline. A nutrient-rich diet can fortify both, promoting resilience through anti-inflammatory, antioxidant-packed foods that support immunity and brain function.

Top Immune-Boosting Superfoods:

- Berries (Blueberries, Strawberries): Bursting with flavonoids and anthocyanins, these combat oxidative stress, enhance brain cell communication, and bolster white blood cell activity.
- Leafy Greens (Spinach, Kale): High in vitamin K, folate, and beta-carotene, they shield neurons and regulate immune responses.
- Fatty Fish (Salmon): Omega-3s like DHA reduce inflammation, slow biological aging, and enhance immune modulation in seniors.
- Nuts (Almonds, Walnuts): Vitamin E and magnesium stabilize immune cells while supporting cognitive health.
- Probiotic Yogurt: Gut-friendly bacteria improve digestion, immunity, and may slow Alzheimer's progression.

By prioritizing these foods and the MIND approach, caregivers reclaim vitality, and loved ones gain vital protection. Small, shared bites yield profound health gains—start today for a stronger tomorrow.

Visit lifestreaminc.org/stepin for a complete list of caregiver support resources.

Handling Stress and Grief through the Holidays

An update from Christy Davidson, Dementia Outreach Specialist

The holidays can be a challenging time for caregivers, often filled with stress, loneliness, and the pressure to create a "perfect" season. Here are some tips and words of encouragement to help you navigate this time with grace and self-compassion:

1. Prioritize Self-Care

- Simplify Your Expectations: You don't have to do it all. Focus on what truly matters to you and your loved ones.
- Take Breaks: Even 10 minutes of quiet time can help. Use this time to meditate, stretch, or simply breathe deeply.
- Stay Active: A short walk or light exercise can boost your mood and energy levels.

2. Stay Connected

- Reach Out: If you're feeling lonely, call a friend, join a support group, or connect with others online. You're not alone in this journey.
- Accept Help: Let others assist with tasks like cooking, shopping, or caregiving. People often want to help but don't know how—don't hesitate to ask.
- Celebrate in Small Ways: If large gatherings aren't possible, create meaningful moments with your loved one, like watching a favorite holiday movie or sharing a special meal.

3. Manage Stress

- Set Boundaries: It's okay to say no to activities or traditions that feel overwhelming.
- Practice Gratitude: Reflect on small joys, like a kind word or a peaceful moment, to shift your focus from stress to positivity.
- Seek Professional Support: If feelings of loneliness or stress become overwhelming, consider speaking with a counselor or therapist.

4. Adjust Holiday Traditions

- Adapt Traditions: Modify traditions to fit your current situation. For example, if traveling isn't possible, host a virtual gathering or create new, simpler traditions.
- Focus on the Present: Cherish the time you have with your loved one, even if it looks different from past holidays.

Encouragement for You

- You Are Enough: The love and care you provide are invaluable. You don't need to be perfect to make a difference.
- Celebrate Small Wins: Every act of kindness, patience, and care is a victory worth celebrating.
- You Deserve Joy Too: It's okay to find moments of happiness for yourself. Caring for your well-being is not selfish—it's essential.

Remember, the holidays don't have to be picture-perfect to be meaningful. You're doing an incredible job, and your efforts are deeply appreciated, even if they sometimes go unspoken. Take it one day at a time, and know that you are not alone.

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Care Team Resource Binders

LifeStream's STEP In Caregiver Programs are a comprehensive way to educate and support family caregivers, care partners, and people with care needs. LifeStream offers Caregiver Memory Kits, support groups, and evidence-based programs to help you STEP In to caregiving.

LifeStream Services is also thrilled to provide caregivers and care partners with a resource binder that is an organizational tool used to prepare in the case that someone else may need to step in and provide care—either temporarily or permanently—and to empower caregivers who help with care needs.

Individuals who may need to step in could include another family member, a professional caregiver, a neighbor, or a friend. All of these care partners make up your care team.

To learn more, reach out to ***stepin@lifestreaminc.org***