

# CaregiverConnection

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## Managing the challenges of winter

By Brenda Juskavitch



Many people find it hard to like winter. The cold, snow, ice, and long nights of this season can create many challenges for caregivers.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to get through the cold months safely and even happily.

### Make the most of the outdoors

Everyone likes to keep warm in winter. Getting fresh air and sunlight on those bright but cold days is good for you and can do wonders for your state of mind. Sunlight is a natural mood booster, and it helps reset your body clock, keeping the sleep–wake cycle in sync.

If your loved one is able to join you sometimes, they may experience the same benefits. Here are some ideas for outdoor activities:

- **Go for a walk.** Take your loved one on a walk if you think they're stable enough on their feet. Be sure the surfaces you're walking on are secure and free of ice. Dress warmly, wear sturdy boots, and enjoy. Being outside can have a calming effect on your mood.
- **Notice the birds.** You'll see plenty of them while you're walking. Or, set up a feeder in your yard, so you can enjoy seeing the different kinds of birds who come to feast on your birdseed. Your loved one may find it fun to watch them, too.
- **Take photos.** You may be surprised by how much beauty you find outdoors, especially in the winter. If your loved one isn't up to taking photos or accompanying you, you can share your images when you go inside again.
- **Jog, hike, snowshoe, skate, ski.** Any form of physical activity can boost your mood and help you relax. [Exercise can help caregivers](#) reduce the risk of getting a chronic disease, and it can also decrease stress.

## Enjoy the indoors

If it's too cold or icy and your caregiving responsibilities don't allow you to get outside—or you truly can't stand the winter weather—find ways to relax and recharge indoors. These are some activities that you may want to try on your own or, if possible, with your loved one:

- **Try a new recipe** or enhance one you already make by adding different vegetables, herbs, and spices.
- **Work on a home improvement or art project.**
- **Read.** A book can become group entertainment if you read it aloud. You can also start a mini book club with [those who help you with caregiving](#).
- **Find a quiet spot** to have a mug of something warm, like hot cocoa or tea.
- **Watch a movie, a concert, or a favorite TV show** on your own or with your loved one. Or watch home movies. Play them 10–15 minutes at a time if longer periods aren't possible.
- **Meditate, practice yoga, or try mindfulness.** Just 10 or 15 minutes at a time can be helpful. There are many meditation or exercise classes online or smartphone apps available to try.
- **Refresh your space** with colorful decorative pillows or a bouquet of fresh flowers. Candles are also nice, just remember to use sturdy holders, keep them away from drafts or flammable objects, and to never leave them unattended when lit.
- **Contact someone you miss.** Call, write a letter, or reach out via video chat apps such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, or WhatsApp. Connecting with others may boost your and your loved one's spirits.
- **Eat a healthy snack.** During winter months, people tend to eat more comfort foods, which tend to be less healthy. Whenever you can, choose the healthiest versions, such as carrots and hummus instead of chips and dip. [Nutrition is as important for caregivers](#) as it is for those receiving care.
- **Express gratitude.** It can have a positive effect on your mood and help boost someone else's. Send a thank-you note or call someone who helped you in the past to express your appreciation.

## Be ready for storms and power outages

You may feel more relaxed if you know you're prepared for possible power outages and impassable roads during storms, whether during the winter or any other season. Here are some things you can do in advance to be ready for a storm. Don't wait for bad weather to be upon you—prepare well before that.

- Stock up on water, non-perishable food, flashlights, and batteries.
- Make sure you have all the medical supplies and prescription medications you and your loved one need. If you happen to get caught without medical supplies during a storm, check with your pharmacy to see if they have a delivery service.
- If your loved one needs oxygen, contact your electric company to get on a list for priority service in case the power goes out. Or consider buying or borrowing a generator.
- Make sure your smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors work.
- Keep your cell phone, laptop, and portable chargers fully charged.
- Put contact information for your loved one's health care provider, the police department, the fire department, and any other important contacts into your phone. Also

write them on paper and keep that list in a place where you can easily find it, even if you lose electricity.

- Have plenty of blankets and sweaters handy.

Having these items and plans in place now will save you a lot of worry and stress if a storm does come. With all these tips, you'll be ready for the best—and worst—of winter.

*Brenda Juskavitch is a manager of health promotions at Fallon Health. Find more [caregiver resources](#) on the Fallon Health website.*

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