

# THE MESSENGER

From RIVERBEND SENIOR LIVING and WILLOW RIDGE HEALTHCARE



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## Holiday Gift Suggestions for Senior Living Community Residents

Each year, our family members, friends and volunteers ask for gift suggestions. Here are some ideas we hope will save you some shopping time!

### **Clothing**

Select comfortable clothing that fits your loved one's tastes. For a fun touch, your loved one might like a holiday sweatshirt, a shirt imprinted with a family photo, or inexpensive jewelry or holiday pins. Slippers and warm socks are also appreciated. Clothing should be loose fitting and easy to put on, with no difficult fastenings. It should also be machine washable. And be sure to ask staff about marking clothing with your loved one's name.

### **Books, tapes and media**

If your loved one is an avid reader, a book or magazine subscription could be a great gift. Puzzle books and adult coloring books also are popular these days. If your loved one has low vision, find out if large-print books work for them, or invest in an e-book reader, which can turn any written material into large print. Books on tape are also good, or load a device with their favorite music, TV shows and movies.

### **Photo albums or pictures**

Put together a scrapbook, album or digital picture frame loaded with family photos. Or bring a family portrait for the wall, even an enlarged photo of a favorite pet. A special, personal gift like this takes some forethought, but your efforts will be appreciated.

### **Room brighteners**

Consider room decor that helps personalize your loved one's space, such as a family quilt, a plant, or a special photo collage. Or commission the grandkids to create a



work of art especially for your loved one. Ask staff for guidelines about decorating your loved one's room for the holidays. Space is limited, so don't bring oversized gifts or things which will be of little use.

### **Useful items**

The simple things make life more pleasant. How about toiletries and cosmetics, such as lotions, soap, lipstick, or a pretty lap robe? If your loved one tends to misplace their glasses, a brightly colored glasses strap might be a good choice. Don't bring expensive or easily misplaced items such as family heirloom jewelry.

### **Special treats**

Check with nursing staff before bringing in food; then, within any dietary guidelines, bring in your loved one's favorite goodies, such as holiday cookies, cakes or fruit. If your loved one has always been the holiday baker in your family, ask for the recipes—those special, traditional treats are especially meaningful.

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# Family Caregivers Play a Vital Role in Today's Healthcare System

**November is National Family Caregivers Month, an occasion to honor the many people who provide care for their elderly and disabled loved ones.**



**There's a growing recognition of the integral role played by spouses, adult children, grandchildren, siblings and other relatives who step up when seniors need help. Family caregiving is an important health issue—both for the person receiving care, and for caregivers themselves.**

Awareness of caregiver issues is so important. Why? Because, as famously noted by former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, “There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers; those who are currently caregivers; those who will be caregivers; and those who will need caregivers.” Here are six things to know:

**Their numbers are growing.** The Family Caregiver Alliance says that almost 35 million people in the U.S. are caring for an older relative—and with the aging of the baby boomers, more and more seniors will need care from loved ones. Meanwhile, a longer lifespan, smaller families and a higher rate of divorce mean the number of people needing care is set to outpace the number of family members able to provide it. Experts say we'll be facing a real “caregiver crunch” by the year 2030.

**Many are employed and/or caring for young children.** A Pew Research Center study found that 12% of parents with a minor child at home were also caring for an older relative. And, say Baylor University experts, so are 25% of employed adults. And then there are the people who are wearing all three hats ... it's no surprise that they report feeling very torn among their various duties.

**Caregivers are doing more and more.** An in-depth 2019 study from AARP revealed that millions of caregivers today provide care that would be considered medical and complex—wound care, administering injections, using meters and monitors, and other tasks that were once relegated to nurses. And a majority of these caregivers say they feel woefully unprepared for the task! They don't feel well trained, and they fear making a mistake.

**They aren't taking care of their own health.**

Caregivers can spend so much time focused on their loved one's needs that they neglect their own well-being, even if they have health challenges of their own. Many are at the age when, in previous generations, they would have been receiving care themselves! In October 2019, the American Heart Association noted that the stress of juggling caregiving, work and other family duties can even harm their hearts.

**They save our healthcare system a lot of money.**

Here's another reason to support these people who do so much. Estimates are that the free labor provided by caregivers would cost upwards of \$500 billion if provided by professionals. A study from University of Michigan showed that when overwhelmed caregivers suffer from fatigue, sleep loss and depression, their loved one is more likely to be hospitalized and incur higher Medicare costs.



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### Holiday Gift Ideas *from page 1*

#### **Experiences**

These days, there's an emphasis on giving experiences rather than stuff. With the "decluttering" movement, people are choosing theater tickets, adventures, museum memberships and tours. If your loved one is a short-term rehab resident, a gift certificate for a future adventure might lift their spirits. If this is their home, plan a party for your loved one and their friends, or a trip out that is appropriate for your loved one's abilities and preferences. Or how about a personalized gift certificate book, with coupons redeemable for manicures, help with letter writing, smartphone tech support, reading aloud, etc.?

#### **Handy health helpers**

All kinds of gadgets are available to make it easier to manage medical conditions. How about a medication organizer, an adjustable cane or a new mobility device? If your loved one has vision loss, a magnifying glass or page magnifier can make reading easier. Grabbers and other clever products make it easier to dress and perform other daily activities.

#### **If your loved one has memory loss**

The Alzheimer's Association recommends items that aid memory, such as magnetic reminder notepads, a pocket-sized diary or calendar, or a digital calendar clock with the date and time in large type. If you're not sure about whether a gift is appropriate or safe for your loved one, ask staff.

**If it's possible, deliver your holiday gifts yourself!**  
**A visit from you is the best gift of all.**