

Senior Living for the Holidays



Overcoming Mobility Challenges

Mobility impairments don't have to impair the joy of the holiday season.

There are plenty of activities that are inclusive, enjoyable and can accommodate people with all sorts of needs.

CRAFTING AND CARDS

One activity seniors with limited mobility can enjoy is creating holiday crafts. Set up a crafting station with simple and accessible supplies such as paper, markers, stickers and glue. Seniors can make holiday cards, ornaments or decorations to add a personal touch to their living space or share with friends and family.

Helping seniors send out greeting cards can also be a way to promote holiday cheer. Care.com suggests caregivers set up a mailing station with envelopes, stamps, an address book and holiday cards in one place. Seniors can make their own cards or use store-bought ones.

WATCH A MOVIE

Another enjoyable activity is watching holiday movies. Set up a cozy viewing area with comfortable seating and a selection of classic holiday films. Seniors can reminisce about their favorite holiday memories while enjoying heartwarming movies. This activity fosters a sense of nostalgia and togetherness, creating a warm and festive atmosphere.



© ADOBE STOCK

“For those seniors who are homebound or unable to leave their senior living facility, putting on a favorite holiday movie can be nostalgic,” Lisa Mayfield, a geriatric mental health specialist, told Care.com.

The website suggests such movies as “It’s a Wonderful Life,” “Miracle on 34th Street,” “A Christmas Story” or “A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving.”

COOKING AND BAKING

For seniors who enjoy cooking or baking, host a holiday baking session. Choose simple recipes that involve minimal

physical exertion. Seniors can measure ingredients, mix batter or decorate cookies. Baking together produces delicious treats and provides an opportunity for seniors to socialize, share stories and bond over a shared love of food.

Care.com points out cookie decorating can be done at a kitchen counter or table so those with limited mobility can join in. They recommend finding cookie cutters that match the holiday being celebrated. Cookie decorating can be done with, for example, red, black and green icing for Kwanzaa or

blue and gold for Hanukkah menorahs.

GAMES

Organize a holiday-themed trivia or reminiscence game. Create trivia questions about holiday traditions, songs or movies, and encourage seniors to participate individually or in teams. Alternatively, prompt discussions about favorite holiday memories or traditions, allowing seniors to share their experiences and connect.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS

One of the joys of the holiday

season is the way homeowners and businesses go all out to decorate their buildings with festive lights. Many of these can be observed through driving tours. Some communities set up trails through parks with interactive light shows.

“When my grandmother wasn’t able to drive anymore, I would drive her around town at night,” Jason Tansey of Virginia told Care.com. “We would look at all of the houses lit up in holiday lights and check out festive holiday decorations. It was one of our favorite traditions.”

Do-it-Yourself Decor and Gifts

Festive crafts and do-it-yourself (DIY) projects during the holidays offer more than just an opportunity to create handmade decorations and gifts.

They also foster creativity and social engagement among participants, especially seniors.

Engaging in craft activities encourages seniors to tap into their creativity, explore new ideas, and express themselves through art. This creative process can be particularly fulfilling during the holiday season, as it allows people to infuse their own personal touch into their decorations and gifts.

One great benefit of festive crafts and DIY projects is their accessibility and ease of execution. Many holiday craft ideas require simple materials that are readily available and affordable, making them accessible to people of all ages and skill levels. From paper snowflakes and handmade ornaments to festive wreaths and DIY greeting cards, there are countless craft ideas that are easy to learn and enjoyable to create.

Moreover, engaging in festive crafts can be a social



© ADOBE STOCK

activity that brings people together. Whether it's crafting with family members, friends or fellow community members, working on DIY projects in a group setting fosters social engagement and strengthens bonds. Crafting

together allows individuals to share ideas, collaborate on projects and support one another in their creative endeavors. It's a wonderful way to connect with others and create lasting memories during the holiday season.

While not all seniors are grandparents, for those that are, crafting provides an activity to do with beloved grandchildren.

"Doing a craft together creates that engagement and bonding, but you become less

dependent on conversation, if that's becoming harder for the senior," said Lisa Mayfield, a certified care manager at Aging Wisdom, mental health counselor and geriatric mental health specialist. "This is a great way to build a connection."

In addition to fostering creativity and social engagement, festive crafts and DIY projects can serve practical purposes. Handmade holiday decorations add a personal and unique touch to any home or gathering, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. Similarly, DIY gifts are not only thoughtful and heartfelt but also demonstrate the time and effort put into creating something special for a loved one.

One craft grandparents and grandkids can do together are handprint Christmas trees made with both of their handprints for a memento that will be precious to both of them. Here is one method for making it, adapted from Michaels.com:

Step one: Paint each other's hand with green paint. Press it onto a large piece of paper or your canvas of choice. Use several handprints to create a tree shape, re-adding paint for each handprint. Let it dry.

Step two: Dip a finger into red or gold paints and press onto the canvas to create fingerprint ornaments on the tree. You can also use a Q-tip dipped in paint to create strings of light.

Step three: Paint a tree trunk at the bottom and a star on top of the tree. Let dry.

Dealing with Loss

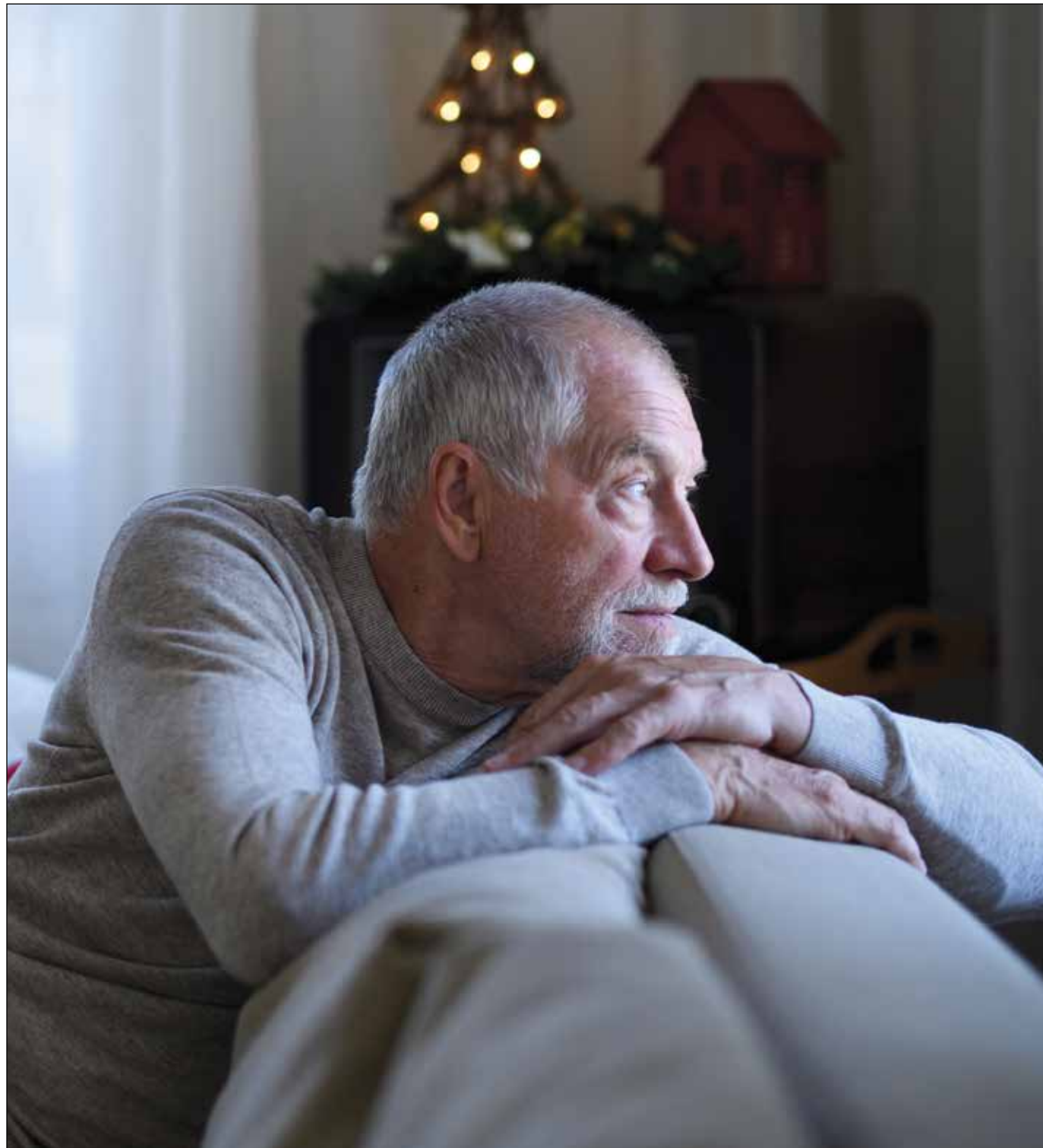
The holiday season can be a time of joy and celebration, but for many seniors, it can also bring feelings of sadness and longing, especially for those who have lost loved ones.

Rather than avoiding these emotions, however, seniors can find comfort and solace by honoring and remembering their departed loved ones during the holidays.

The National Council on Aging says there is no one right way to grieve during the holidays. People grieve in different ways and it is important for anyone, but especially seniors, to accept whatever emotions they experience. They encourage seniors to learn about grief, express their feelings, be flexible with holiday traditions, draw from past coping skills, take care of themselves, hold conflicting feelings, plan ahead and set boundaries.

AARP encourages people who are grieving to only do what feels right and to be gentle with themselves.

One meaningful way for seniors to remember their loved ones during the holidays is by creating a memorial display in their home. This could be a dedicated space where they can display photographs, mementos and other



© ADOBE STOCK

cherished items that remind them of their departed loved ones.

Seniors can include items that were meaningful to their loved ones, such as their favorite holiday decorations or ornaments. Creating a

memorial display can provide seniors with a tangible way to feel connected to their loved ones and keep their memory alive during the holiday season.

AARP suggests lighting candles, talking about the lost one

on social media, planting a tree in the memory of the deceased or placing a photo or something significant on the tree or amid the holiday decorations.

Another way for seniors to honor their loved ones during

the holidays is by participating in remembrance ceremonies or rituals. Many communities and religious organizations hold special services or events during the holiday season to honor those who have passed away. It might include a Blue Christmas service, a Catholic Mass or a Jewish kaddish. Seniors can attend these ceremonies and take part in comforting rituals. These ceremonies can provide a sense of community and support, as seniors join others who are also grieving during the holidays.

Another way for seniors to find comfort is in incorporating their loved ones' traditions and rituals into holiday celebrations. This could involve cooking their loved ones' favorite holiday recipes, listening to their favorite holiday music or watching their favorite holiday movies. By keeping these traditions alive, seniors can feel a sense of connection to their departed loved ones and honor their memory in a meaningful way.

It's important for seniors to take care of themselves during the holiday season, especially if they are grieving the loss of a loved one. This may involve seeking support from friends, family members or a grief counselor, as well as taking time for self-care activities such as meditation, exercise or spending time in nature. By taking care of their emotional and physical well-being, seniors can better cope with their grief and find moments of peace and joy.

Decorating Tips for Seniors

Many seniors, like people of all ages, look forward to decking their living spaces with festive decorations.

More than ever, though, older adults living independently or in senior living communities have to take special caution to keep those decorations safe. With a few thoughtful considerations, seniors can create a warm and welcoming holiday atmosphere while minimizing the risk of accidents or injuries.

CHOOSING DECORATIONS

Opt for lightweight and non-breakable decorations such as plastic ornaments, fabric banners and foam-based figurines. These items are less likely to cause injury if they fall and are easier to handle for seniors with limited mobility or dexterity.

Instead of traditional candles, use flameless LED candles to create a cozy ambiance without the risk of fire hazards. LED string lights are a safer alternative to traditional incandescent lights, as they produce less heat and are more energy-efficient.

Incorporate soft fabrics and textures into your decor to add warmth and visual interest without sacrificing safety. Consider using plush throws, velvet ribbons and felt ornaments to create a tactile and inviting environment.

Choose battery-operated



© ADOBE STOCK

decorations for added convenience and safety. Battery-powered lights, wreaths and tabletop decorations eliminate the need for electrical outlets and reduce the risk of electrical fires or shocks.

Explore adaptive decorations designed specifically for seniors or individuals with disabilities. Look for decorations with large buttons, easy-to-grip handles and adjustable features that accommodate different mobility levels and abilities.

SAFE DECORATING TECHNIQUES

Keep pathways clear and free of clutter to prevent tripping or stumbling. Avoid using extension cords or loose wires that could pose a tripping hazard, and secure decorations firmly to surfaces to prevent them from falling.

Ensure rugs and mats are securely anchored to the floor to prevent slipping or tripping accidents. Use double-sided tape or non-slip rug pads to

keep them in place, especially in high-traffic areas or where moisture may be present.

Focus on decorating areas easily accessible and within reach, such as tabletops, mantels and shelves. Avoid placing decorations in hard-to-reach areas that require stretching or climbing, as this could increase the risk of falls.

Enlist the help of family members, friends or caregivers to assist with decorating

tasks that may be challenging for seniors to do alone. Decorating together can be a fun and meaningful way to bond and create lasting memories.

Above all, prioritize comfort and enjoyment when decorating for the holidays. Choose decorations that reflect your personal style and preferences, and don't hesitate to simplify or scale back if necessary to ensure a safe and stress-free holiday season.

Celebrating at a Senior Living Facility

Residents in senior living communities celebrate a myriad of cultural holidays and traditions.

From Hanukkah to Christmas, Kwanzaa to Diwali, these communities are home to residents with a diverse range of cultures. This creates an opportunity for them to share their cultural backgrounds with each other and create richly layered celebrations.

One aspect of senior living communities is the opportunity for residents to connect and learn from one another's cultural backgrounds. At the onset of winter, many communities organize special events and festivities that showcase the diverse traditions of their residents. From multicultural holiday potlucks to cultural music and dance performances, these events provide seniors with the opportunity to share their customs and heritage with their peers.

Cogir Senior Living, which manages 60 different senior living communities, writes that they encourage celebrations of a variety of winter holidays including Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Yule, Christmas and Las Posadas. They stress the importance of honoring and acknowledging everyone's traditions.

They describe the creation of fusion activities which "create a dual sense of care and companionship: opportunities to honor one's traditions and make new



© ADOBE STOCK

friendships that will last beyond the season."

They recommend having everyone share their holiday rituals, beliefs and artifacts, recognizing that even those celebrating the same holiday may do it differently. Then, they suggest, look for ways to combine similar traditions in a new way such as hosting a lighting ceremony that encompasses many traditions.

For seniors of Jewish heritage, the celebration of Hanukkah holds special significance. In senior living communities, residents light the menorah, sing traditional

songs and enjoy traditional Hanukkah foods such as latkes and sufganiyot. Hanukkah-themed crafts and activities may be offered, providing opportunities for creativity and camaraderie.

Seniors of Christian faith celebrate Christmas with festive decorations, carol singing and religious services. Many senior living communities host Christmas tree lighting ceremonies, holiday concerts and nativity displays.

For Black seniors, the celebration of Kwanzaa honors African heritage and culture. Kwanzaa-themed events may

feature storytelling, drumming circles and traditional Kwanzaa feasts. Residents gather to light the kinara, exchange hand-made gifts and reflect on the seven principles of Kwanzaa, including unity, self-determination and collective responsibility.

Senior communities may offer celebrations of other cultural traditions, including Diwali, Lunar New Year and Three Kings Day. Residents of Indian descent may celebrate Diwali with colorful decorations, rangoli art, and traditional Indian sweets, while seniors of Asian heritage may

observe Lunar New Year with dragon dances, dumpling-making workshops, and lantern festivals. Christians, especially those of Hispanic heritage, celebrate Three Kings Day on Epiphany, often exchanging gifts.

Diverse communities foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity, where residents can share their customs, stories and memories with one another. As seniors gather to celebrate cultural holidays and traditions, they form bonds of friendship and understanding that enrich their lives and strengthen their sense of community.

Finding a Great Gift

Choosing the perfect gift for seniors can sometimes be challenging, but with a little thought and consideration, it's possible to find something that is thoughtful and practical.

Everyone has their own personality, so take into account the person's interests, hobbies and overall well-being.

Here are some gift ideas that can bring joy and comfort to the seniors in your life.

RELAXATION GIFTS

Many seniors appreciate gifts that help them relax and unwind. Consider giving them a cozy blanket or throw to keep them warm during the colder months. A scented candle or essential oil diffuser can create a calming atmosphere in their home. Additionally, a plush robe and slippers set can make them feel pampered and comfortable.

HOBBY SUPPLIES

Encourage seniors to pursue their hobbies and interests by giving them supplies related to their favorite activities. For example, if they enjoy painting or drawing, consider giving them a set of high-quality art supplies. If they are a fan of gardening, a new set of



© ADOBE STOCK

gardening tools or seeds for their favorite flowers or vegetables can make a thoughtful gift.

MEMORY KEEPING

Help seniors preserve their precious memories by giving them gifts that allow them to document and cherish special moments. A beautiful photo album or scrapbook can

provide them with a place to store photographs and mementos. Alternatively, consider giving them a digital photo frame preloaded with family photos, so they can enjoy their memories on display.

TECHNOLOGY

Embrace the digital age by

giving seniors gifts that help them stay connected with loved ones and explore new interests.

A tablet or e-reader can provide them with access to books, movies and games, while allowing them to video chat with family and friends. Additionally, a smartwatch or fitness tracker can help them

stay active and monitor their health.

WELLNESS PRODUCTS

Show seniors that you care about their well-being by giving them gifts that promote health and wellness. Consider giving them a subscription to a meal delivery service that offers nutritious and delicious meals tailored to their dietary needs. Alternatively, a massage or spa gift certificate can provide them with a relaxing and rejuvenating experience.

PERSONALIZED GIFTS

Make seniors feel special by giving them personalized gifts tailored to their interests and preferences. For example, consider giving them a custom-made piece of jewelry engraved with their initials or a meaningful message. Alternatively, a personalized calendar or photo book featuring family photos can make a heartfelt gift.

GIFTS FOR THOSE WITH MEMORY LOSS

Great Senior Living offers advice on gifts for seniors who are struggling with dementia or Alzheimer's. They say the best gifts for them are those "that help ease their anxiety, soothe their agitation or stimulate their minds." This might include one of the services that create custom books based on interview questions, jigsaw puzzles, fidget hand muffs or blankets, an Alzheimer's model day clock, a robotic cat or dog, an RAZ memory cell phone or a wheelchair blanket.

Celebrate with Music

The holiday season is a time for joy, celebration and togetherness, and for seniors, music and entertainment can play a significant role in enhancing their holiday experience.

Whether it's listening to their favorite holiday tunes or participating in live performances and sing-alongs, holiday music and entertainment can bring seniors comfort, happiness, and a sense of connection during this festive time of year.

In a 2022 study, the National Library of Medicine reported music can help manage symptoms of dementia and build connection between seniors and their caregivers, whether it is singing, dancing or playing simple instruments. Even just listening to familiar songs decreased depression, agitation and anxiety.

"Listening and reminiscing to music is a fun way to spend time together at the holidays, and those who are more mobile can get up and dance," Barbara Campbell, a certified therapeutic recreation specialist, told Care.com.

One of the most significant benefits of holiday music and entertainment for seniors is its ability to evoke cherished memories and emotions.



© ADOBE STOCK

Many seniors have fond memories associated with holiday music, whether it's singing carols with family and friends or attending holiday concerts and performances. Listening to familiar holiday songs can transport seniors back in time, helping them feel nostalgic and connected to their past experiences.

Music therapy has numerous health benefits for seniors, including reducing stress, anxiety and depression, improving mood and overall well-being, and enhancing cognitive function

and memory. Holiday music, in particular, can have a powerful effect on seniors' emotional and mental health, providing them with a sense of comfort, happiness and belonging.

The holidays are a great time for seniors to benefit from participating in live entertainment and virtual performances. Many senior living communities and organizations host holiday-themed events and concerts featuring local musicians, singers and performers. These live performances provide seniors with

an opportunity to socialize, engage with others and experience the joy of live entertainment.

Furthermore, virtual performances and sing-alongs have become increasingly popular in recent years, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Seniors can now enjoy holiday concerts and performances from home, thanks to online streaming platforms and virtual event platforms. Virtual sing-alongs allow seniors to join in the holiday festivities and connect with others, even if they are

unable to attend in-person events.

Participating in holiday music and entertainment can foster a sense of community and belonging. Whether seniors are singing carols at a senior living community or attending a virtual holiday concert with family and friends, they can feel a sense of camaraderie and unity. These shared experiences help combat feelings of loneliness and isolation, which can be particularly prevalent among seniors, especially during the holidays.