

Wellbeing Insights



Laying the Groundwork as a Working Caregiver: *A Practical Guide*

Stepping into a caregiving role, especially while holding down a job, can feel like juggling two full-time commitments. Here's a hands-on guide to creating a caregiving strategy that prioritizes flexible planning, practical solutions, and balancing work and care in the real world.

Continued on page 2

In This Issue

- 01 [Laying the Groundwork as a Working Caregiver: A Practical Guide](#)
- 04 [On the Menu: Cranberries](#)
- 05 [Creative Budgeting for a Joyful Holiday Season](#)
- 06 [Building Community Connection This Holiday Season](#)

Looking for ways to boost your self-care routine? [Click here](#) for your daily inspiration!



Laying the Groundwork as a Working Caregiver: A Practical Guide

Continued from page 1

Charting Your Routes: The Core of a Caregiving Strategy

One of the most helpful things you can do is chart your caregiving “routes”: reliable backup and emergency options that help you manage daily responsibilities without burning out. The goal isn’t to do it all alone. It’s to be prepared and supported.

Here’s how to build this part of your caregiving map:

1. Daily Routines: Build a Reliable System

Start by documenting what needs to happen every day and who’s responsible for each task. Include:

- Medication management
- Transportation to appointments
- Meals and hydration
- Hygiene or mobility assistance
- Supervision or companionship needs

Then, assign your primary route (you, a family member, or paid helper), and a backup route for each. Think through:

- Who can step in if the aide calls out?
- What happens if you’re stuck late at work?
- Is there a neighbor or friend you could call in a pinch?

Create a written list or calendar. Keep it shared (Google Calendar or a simple spreadsheet) if others are involved in care.

2. Emergencies: Have a Plan Ready

Emergencies can happen, such as hospitalizations or unexpected changes in symptoms or behaviors. To stay ready:

- Keep a printed and digital copy of medical records, medications, allergies, and emergency contacts
- Store a go-bag with essentials in case of a sudden hospital visit
- Identify someone who can take over caregiving duties for 24 to 48 hours if needed

Some hospitals and care managers can help build emergency care plans. Ask your loved one’s doctor or clinic if they offer this support.

3. Respite: Build in Breaks Before You Burn Out

Every caregiver needs rest. Even a few hours a week to decompress can make a major difference.

Here are a few resources to find short-term or ongoing respite care:

- Eldercare Locator (eldercare.acl.gov): A federal service that connects you to local respite, transportation, and meal services.
- ARCH National Respite Network (archrespite.org): Searchable directory of respite providers by state.
- Local Agencies on Aging (AAA): Most counties or cities have an Area Agency on Aging that offers free care consultations, support groups, and help accessing in-home services.

Other respite options include adult day centers, short-term home care, or overnight care at an assisted living facility. Some may be covered in part by Medicaid, Veterans Affairs, or local grants.

Balancing Work and Care: Advocate Early and Often

Caregiving doesn’t exist in a vacuum, it touches every part of your life, especially your job. Many working caregivers hesitate to speak up at work, but clear communication can open doors to essential flexibility.

How to Approach Your Employer or HR:

1. Prepare What You’ll Say

Outline the care responsibilities affecting your schedule (e.g., regular medical appointments, unexpected emergencies).

Identify how your work may be impacted, then offer specific ideas for how you plan to stay on top of it.

2. Ask for What You Need

Be honest about what would help you succeed at both work and caregiving:

- A flexible start/end time?
- One remote day per week?
- Paid time off for a short leave?

Many companies also offer job-protected leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or other internal policies. Your HR team can explain what’s available.

Continued on page 3

Laying the Groundwork as a Working Caregiver: A Practical Guide

Continued from page 2



3. Bring Solutions

Managers often appreciate when you come prepared. You might say:

"I'm navigating new caregiving responsibilities, and I want to make sure I stay on track here. Would it be possible to adjust my hours slightly on Tuesdays for appointments? I'll shift my availability so coverage stays consistent."

4. Explore Benefits

Ask your HR rep about:

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs): These often include free short-term counseling, legal support, and caregiver referral services.
- Backup care programs: Some employers contract with services like Bright Horizons or Care.com to provide vetted short-term in-home care or adult day options.
- Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs): These can sometimes be used for eldercare-related expenses.

Find Your Caregiver Community

Caregiving can feel isolating, but you're far from alone. Support groups and online communities can offer emotional relief, troubleshooting tips, and a sense of solidarity.

- Family Caregiver Alliance ([caregiver.org](https://www.caregiver.org)): Offers online groups, educational resources, and a help line.
- Caregiver Action Network ([caregiveraction.org](https://www.caregiveraction.org)): Includes a "Caregiver Toolbox" with communication templates, emotional health checklists, and links to peer support.
- Facebook Groups or Meetup.com: Search for local or condition-specific groups (e.g., "Working Alzheimer's Caregivers").

You don't have to join a group every week to benefit, sometimes just one good conversation helps you get through a tough stretch.

Cranberries

Cranberries are one of only three fruits native to the U.S., making them a Thanksgiving staple. Cranberries are rich in fiber, manganese, and vitamins C and E. With only 23 calories per half cup, they may be the most figure-friendly food around during the holidays! In terms of antioxidant content, these flavorful berries outrank nearly every single fruit and vegetable, topped only by blueberries.

As if that weren't impressive enough, cranberries claim stake to a completely unique property in the food world – bacterial anti-adhesion. Put simply, cranberries prevent bacteria from sticking to your tissues and multiplying. It is this ability that makes cranberries a very potent ally in the prevention and management of:

- Urinary tract infections
- Gum disease and cavities (e.g., plaque buildup on teeth)
- Heart disease (e.g., plaque buildup in the arteries)
- Stomach ulcers

But don't be fooled by dried cranberries, cranberry sauce, and cranberry juice; they are typically loaded with sugar. When buying these items, make sure cranberries are listed as the first ingredient and try to find options that are no-sugar added or low-sugar.

Here are a few ways to incorporate cranberries all year long:

- Make a homemade trail mix with unsalted nuts, seeds, and dried cranberries. Choose no- or low-sugar added options.
- Include a small handful of frozen cranberries in a fruit smoothie. Incorporate another fruit to add some sweetness.
- Add dried cranberries to your oatmeal or whole-grain cereal. Try adding spices like cinnamon to balance out the tartness of the berries.
- Toss dried or fresh cranberries into your favorite muffin or cookie recipes.

Keep It Fresh

Fresh cranberries can be refrigerated up to two months and freeze well for even longer. As with any fruit, one bad berry will begin to spoil the whole bunch, so be sure to toss out any wrinkled or soft berries before putting them in the fridge.

Cranberry Vinaigrette

To add a seasonal flair to any salad, give this dressing a try.

Ingredients

- ½ cup fresh cranberries
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup walnut oil or flax seed oil
- 1 shallot, peeled, cored, and quartered
- 2 tsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
- 1 tsp. agave or honey
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper

Directions

Puree shallot, cranberries, olive oil, vinegar, walnut or flax oil, thyme, agave or honey, salt, and pepper in a mini prep, food processor or blender until as smooth as possible. Store in a jar in the refrigerator up to 1 week.

Adapted from healthyseasonalrecipes.com

Nutrition Information	
Per Serving (2 Tbsp.)	
Calories	127
Total Fat	14g
Carbohydrates	4g
Sugar	3g
Fiber	1g
Protein	0g
Sodium	143mg

Creative Budgeting for a Joyful Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time of festivities, gift-giving, and making memories with loved ones. However, it's also a time when overspending can easily lead to financial stress when the holidays are over. Here are some ideas that can help you enjoy the holidays while keeping your finances in check.

Set a Holiday-Specific Budget

The first step in holiday budgeting is setting a realistic spending limit. Take a close look at your financial situation, factoring in your income, regular expenses, and any other financial commitments. Once you have a clear picture, determine the amount you can comfortably allocate to holiday expenses without jeopardizing your financial wellbeing. This number will serve as your guiding light throughout the season.

Track Your Spending

To stay on top of your holiday budget, keep a record of all your expenses. Create a spreadsheet or use a budgeting app to log every purchase, from gifts and decorations to travel expenses and holiday meals. Reviewing your spending regularly against your budget will help you adjust as needed and avoid any nasty financial surprises.

Cash-Only Envelope System

One idea to limit spending is to allocate a specific amount of cash for each category of your holiday spending, such as gifts, decorations and meals. Once the cash is gone, stop spending in that category. This forces you to prioritize your spending while avoiding impulse purchases and credit card debt.

Plan Potluck Parties

Hosting holiday gatherings can be costly when you're responsible for all the food and drinks. Instead of shouldering the entire expense, make your events potluck-style. Invite guests to bring their favorite dishes or drinks, spreading the cost among everyone. This not only eases the financial burden but also creates a sense of sharing.

Shop Smart with Discounts & Cashback

Take advantage of holiday sales, discounts, and cashback offers when shopping for gifts and supplies. Check out Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals, as well as other holiday promotions offered by retailers. Additionally, consider using cash-back apps and rewards programs to earn money back on your purchases. These savings can add up quickly.

Gift Creatively

You can show your love and appreciation without breaking the bank by giving thoughtful and creative gifts. Consider gifts that involve experiences, such as cooking a special meal, a movie marathon, or a home spa day. Handmade gifts, like holiday treats or personalized photo albums, can also convey your sentiment without the high price tag.

Secret Santa or Gift Exchange

If you have a large group of friends or family members to exchange gifts with, suggest a Secret Santa or white elephant gift exchange. Each person is responsible for buying just one gift, which can be more thoughtful and budget-friendly in addition to creating fun memories. Set a spending limit to ensure that everyone can comfortably participate without overspending.

Happy budgeting and happy holidays!

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Building Community Connection This Holiday Season

When the weather turns cold, it's tempting to hunker down and stay in, but winter is also one of the richest times to connect with the place you call home. Whether you live in a small town, suburban neighborhood, or big city, the holiday season is filled with opportunities to create meaningful community traditions that foster pride, belonging, and joy.

Here are six thoughtful ways to deepen your connection to your community this winter:

1. Adopt a Local Tradition (or Start One)

Does your town host a holiday parade, menorah lighting, solstice walk, or winter market? Don't just attend, invite others to join, or volunteer to help. Better yet, start a micro-tradition: organize a lantern walk, host a cookie exchange for your street, or drop off handmade cards to your local library or town hall staff.

2. Be a Hometown Tourist

Take one day this season to act like a visitor in your own community. Visit a local museum, landmark, or historical society. Snap photos of downtown decorations. Support a family-run café instead of a chain. When we explore with fresh eyes, we often find reasons to fall in love with where we live.

3. Celebrate Local Makers

Shop at holiday pop-ups, craft fairs, and small businesses. Ask vendors about their products and stories. Consider hosting a "Shop Local Night" with friends; everyone brings a locally made gift to swap. Every dollar you spend locally strengthens your town's economy and its people.

4. Show Up and Cheer Loudly

Whether it's a school concert, community theater, or minor league hockey game, your presence matters. Bring energy, appreciation, and applause. Attending local events isn't just about entertainment, it's about supporting the heartbeat of your community.

5. Create a "Neighborhood Kindness Chain"

This winter, surprise a neighbor with a small gesture; a plate of cookies, a shoveling of their sidewalk, a handwritten note. Leave a card that says, "You've been gifted! Now pass it on." One simple act can ripple across a whole block.

6. Connect Through Local Giving

Find a nearby nonprofit that resonates with you; animal rescue, food pantry, shelter, or youth program. Ask what they truly need. Maybe it's warm socks, holiday volunteers, or just help spreading the word. Local giving builds local strength.

This season, the best way to warm up might not be by the fire, but by stepping outside and rediscovering the people and places around you.



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