

A photograph of a young girl and an elderly woman. The girl, on the left, has her eyes closed and a wide, joyful smile, showing her teeth. She is holding a green gift box with a red ribbon. The woman, on the right, has short grey hair, wears glasses, and is smiling warmly at the girl. She is wearing a red and black plaid shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing warm, out-of-focus lights, suggesting a festive indoor setting like a living room during the holidays.

Home for
the Holidays

COMPLIMENTS OF



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INTRODUCTION

The holiday season is upon us, which means among the extra shopping trips and company parties, there are plenty of extra reasons to connect with family members, young and old. Extra family get-togethers often mean a bit of extra emotion. You may be feeling concerned as this year's holiday celebrations roll around; your aging parent may be living with extra medical conditions this year, or you may be wondering if there are some memory issues at play as well.

Fortunately, the holidays offer time to celebrate old traditions while looking toward the future. Our comprehensive Home for the Holidays guide will give you the tools you need to make solid follow-up steps in regard to what you see in your mom's home this year. We'll be sure to guide you on planning your visit, including possible warning signs to look for, while also giving you some great ideas for holiday gifts that your aging parent one will find meaningful and helpful.





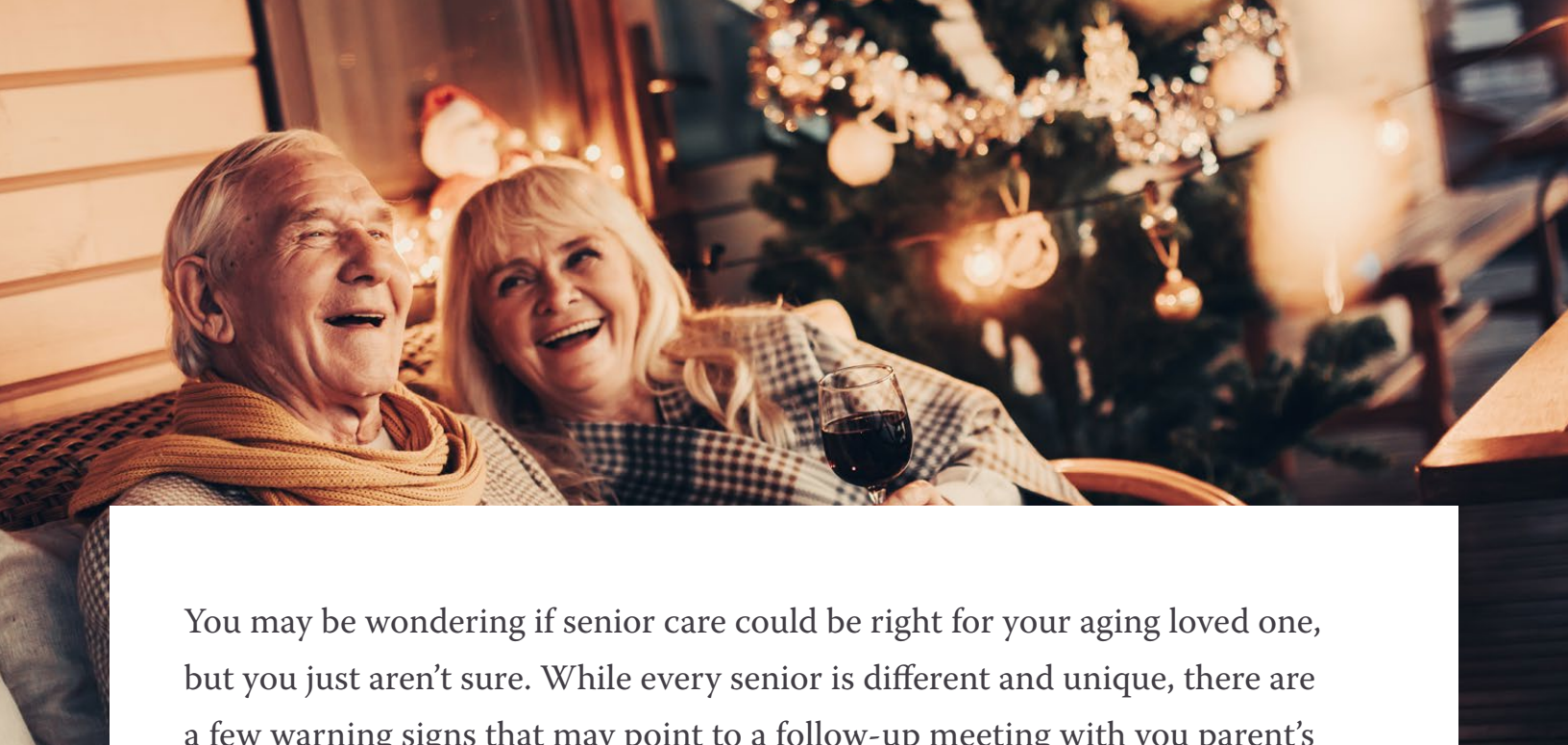
VISITING YOUR PARENT AT HOME

As you are packing up the suitcase and loading up the car, don't forget to take advantage of your time at your mom's home. Spend extra time in the morning lingering over a second cup of coffee or flipping through a treasured photo album beside twinkling lights from the tree. Cook favorite family meals and spend lots of time chatting with your dad. You are, after all, getting an inside look into his home and his daily routine.

This vantage point can give you an inside look into if your loved one is managing any current health conditions or concerns, as well as giving you a head start to addressing any possible challenges or needs.

While you may shy away from thinking about senior care or senior assistance that your parent may need during such a happy and festive time of year, you are actually in the perfect spot to start the process. Being with your mom at home during the holiday season can give you an ideal chance to assess her current challenges and living situation, as well as bring up your concerns in a nonconfrontational way to your parent and other trusted family members.

“Cook favorite family meals and spend lots of time chatting with your dad.”



You may be wondering if senior care could be right for your aging loved one, but you just aren't sure. While every senior is different and unique, there are a few warning signs that may point to a follow-up meeting with your parent's geriatrician or even an assessment with a senior care community. Here are just a few things you may want to look for in between your family's celebrations in order to assess your dad's health, safety, socialization and memory.

Health

When it comes to evaluating your parent's health, you need only sharpen your observation for how he or she is feeling and managing any chronic conditions. Possible warning signs may include:

- Inability to manage his or her own prescription medications or schedule (Is he or she checking his or her insulin levels consistently as per instruction? Does he or she have a designated place to keep his or her medications? Is he or she taking the correct dose?)
- Becoming more winded or fatigued than usual
- Taking more rest breaks, especially during longer periods of activity or commotion
- Appearing to be in pain throughout the day
- Choosing to skip favorite family celebrations or traditions due to not feeling well, feeling tired or being in pain

Safety

Your mom's safety is a paramount concern, especially if he or she is currently living alone and without assistance. Safety can include a variety of factors ranging from environmental concerns to physical and cognitive abilities. Here are a few things that may be some cause for concern:

- A home with many stairs, flooring changes (carpet to hardwood, etc.) or necessary rooms on multiple levels
- Your parent's inability to successfully navigate through the home with a walker, cane or other mobility device
- Many rugs or a crowded floor plan (this can lead to falls or stumbles)
- A bathtub or shower without assistive devices such as a shower chair or grab bars
- Your mom's inability to transfer confidently and safely from chair to toilet or toilet to tub
- Decreased strength and endurance as evidenced by inability to stand up from the seated position
- Emergency systems are not in place to get help when needed (cell phone nearby, emergency pendant call system, etc.)
- Living alone and without helpful neighbors nearby
- Refrigerator and pantry cabinets without healthy, fresh and ready-to-prepare food
- An inaccessible mailbox
- Snowy, icy and neglected sidewalks, front stairs, pathways or porch

Socialization

Your parent's social calendar is actually a wonderful thing to look at during your time together. The holidays often come with more social engagements. This will be an opportune time to evaluate how your loved one handles the additional activity. Healthy socialization fosters a sense of connection and encouragement and leads to increased quality of life and even increased cognition for seniors. Be concerned if you notice any of the following socialization warning signs:

- Living alone, without neighbors or friends nearby
- Voicing sadness or loneliness due to lack of friendships
- No visitors or phone calls from friends while you are visiting
- Lack of technology awareness (connecting via video call or social media can have a positive effect for seniors, but only if they know how to use the technology safely)

“This will be an opportune time to evaluate how your loved one handles the additional activity.”



Memory

Finally, seniors who may be experiencing the early stages of dementia will spend most of their time with family masking any forgetfulness that they may have. Look for other clues that could indicate a memory or judgment issue:

- Spoiled food in the refrigerator or pantry
- Poor hygiene
- Inability to button his or her own shirt
- Stacks of mail or other papers throughout the home
- Unpaid bills or missing checks
- Reminder notes hidden throughout the home
- Tasks that are completed only halfway (a sink full of dirty and clean dishes, laundry separated but not washed, etc.)
- Personality changes that include angry outbursts or sudden sadness
- Wearing clothes or accessories that are inappropriate for the season, weather or occasion

If you notice one or several warning signs, take a deep breath. Resist the urge to confront your mom with your concerns right away. Instead, take a few more hours or days together to approach the situation in a helpful manner. You may even consider talking about your concerns with other family members who are in town for the holidays as well. Your instinct is often right; if you feel like your dad is not safe or healthy, or just isn't acting like him- or herself, a follow-up conversation with your dad and his geriatrician is certainly warranted.

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VISITING YOUR PARENT IN A COMMUNITY

Holiday gatherings may not be happening at your parent's home this year, but instead at his or her senior care community. Fortunately, most senior care communities offer family events focused on the holidays for everyone to enjoy together. Your mom may also choose to host a family event in her senior care apartment or other space within the community. In any of these cases, be sure to take advantage! Your dad will enjoy showing off the new apartment and giving you the grand tour of the community. You and your family will get the chance to see where your parent one now spends his or her days, as well as with whom he or she spends time. Meet your parent's friends and say hello to the staff; you are all extended family now.



You may be wondering if your mom is truly happy, safe, or engaged at her senior care community. A holiday visit is a great time to take a look around, get to know the staff, and assess how your loved one is doing in his or her new home. Here are just a few things to think about as you are enjoying your time with your parent in his or her apartment or community:



Schedule a time to have a Care Plan meeting during your visit, especially if you live far away from the community and miss out on yearly or quarterly meetings with the care team. You will have the opportunity to meet with representatives from the interdisciplinary team of professionals who work with your parent, as well as your parent too. This is a wonderful time to get a feel for how things are going for your parent, as well as to get any questions answered or concerns addressed.



Ask for a calendar of events from the community and ask your loved one what he or she has attended so far. This is a good way to determine if your mom is engaged in group activities throughout the community, and you can take the calendar home to ask about upcoming events on the phone with her later.



See if your parent mentions friends or introduces you to some new neighbors who are important to him or her. Remember: One of the perks of community living is the social connection and peer support. Ensure that your dad is taking advantage of that by making friends and new acquaintances.



Ask your parent how the meals are and what some of his or her favorite dishes are. These questions can help you assess if your mom is eating well and enjoying the nutritious foods available at the community, as well as determining if there are adequate choices available.



Listen for verbal and nonverbal cues that your loved one is happy and engaged at the community. You know your parent the best, and your intuition will serve you well in determining if your mom or dad is thriving and safe in his or her senior care community.



Observe your loved one's hygiene, noting if you think there needs to be some more assistance or attention to personal details by the caregiving staff. You can also take a look at your parent's apartment, focusing on cleanliness and safety.

Your time with your parent in the community may be brief, so do your best to enjoy the moments, while also making casual observations that could help you address specific situations or concerns with staff at a later date.



AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

If you found yourself concerned about your parent after your holiday time together, don't put off your action steps. After you address your concerns with your mom and other family members, make a geriatrician appointment to talk about what options may be available, or pertinent, to your loved one's specific situation and condition.

If you find yourself feeling concerned about the care your dad is receiving in a senior care community, make an appointment to talk with the executive director or director of nursing. Before you have your meeting, make a list of specific examples that you observed during your visit that alarmed or concerned you. Keep the list handy while you talk on the phone and take the time to address your concerns, as well as to work with the community staff to develop a plan going forward.

Your holiday time with your parent is so much more than refrigerator checks and apartment inspections. There's tree-trimming and favorite desserts, familiar songs and gifts. If you are stumped on what to wrap up for your mom this year, let us offer you a few ideas for choosing a gift for your parent that will be meaningful, helpful and loved.

“Your holiday time with your parent is so much more than refrigerator checks and apartment inspections.”



GIFT GIVING GUIDE FOR SENIORS

Seniors can be difficult to purchase gifts for and often state they have everything they need, which makes gift-giving even more difficult. Try to choose a gift that evokes positive memories or a gift that will get regular use.

Memory Gifts

- Turn a favorite family photo or vacation memory into a beautiful piece of art for your parent's wall.
- A digital photo frame can be loaded with a variety of images and videos for your mom to enjoy all year long.
- Work with family members to create a scrapbook full of favorite memories of your mom or dad.
- Compile your parent's favorite recipes into a family cookbook that you print at your local copy store.





Unusual Gifts

- A lovely, cozy blanket is always an appreciated gift.
- A subscription to a favorite magazine or reminiscing tool (remember to get large print if it is available or tuck in a handy magnifying bookmark to complete the gift).
- A subscription to a meal preparation service that sends ingredients for nutritious and delicious recipes right to your mom's door.
- Snug and safe socks make a great stocking stuffer.
- A monthly (or quarterly) subscription will keep them with new flowers or chocolate all year long.
- A basket for your parent's walker or mobility device.

“Your holiday time with your parent is so much more than refrigerator checks and apartment inspections.”

Gifts for Seniors Living in a Senior Community

If purchasing gifts for a parent who is living in a senior care community, keep your gifts space-friendly and useful:

- Gift cards to favorite restaurants (make sure they deliver to your parent's apartment) or shops (make sure the shop is accessible on the community's transportation route)
- A senior-friendly tablet uploaded with a few favorite (and easy-to-manage) games or social media apps
- Favorite lotions or shower gels
- Gift certificate for the community's hair salon, covering the cost of a haircut, style or pedicure
- A new wreath or welcome sign for your mom's apartment door (be sure your gift is fireproof and allowed by community guidelines)
- A houseplant in a lovely basket for your dad to grow and enjoy in his apartment

“If purchasing gifts for a parent who is living in a senior care community, keep your gifts space-friendly and useful”

Gifts for Seniors Living with Alzheimer's Disease or Other Dementia

Buying a gift for a parent who is living with dementia can be extra emotional and trying. Consider buying

gifts that will evoke happy memories, engage them, or assist them with everyday tasks:

- A monthly calendar personalized with family photos
- Recordable books, complete with his or her grandchild reading the story aloud
- A DVD with family photos set to familiar music
- Sensory activities and engaging tools for busy hands
- Make sensory boxes that are full of items that appeal to your parent's history, preferences and hobbies
- Lavender pillow or sheet sprays can help calm anxiety and reduce insomnia
- Favorite lotions or nail polishes
- Favorite candies or sweets
- A new piece of costume jewelry (don't buy real jewels; instead, opt for lovely costume pieces that your mom one will enjoy)
- A new coat, hat, or mittens that your dad can use to stay warm when going on community outings with staff and friends
- Favorite CDs or digital copies of songs from your parent's past
- An age-appropriate and dignified stuffed animal



This holiday season might be different for you or your parent due to health concerns or conditions. However, we hope that you are able to put some of your anxiety aside for a few moments so that you can enjoy meaningful moments in the time that you have. Stay observant and address your concerns appropriately, but don't let your worry cloud your experience with your loved one. From our family to yours, wishing you a happy and safe holiday season full of memories and new beginnings!



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