

Caring Connections Chronicle

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Time to Hibernate and Rejuvenate

Hibernation or Cabin Fever?

Winters can be long here in Northwestern Ontario, and for caregivers they can often feel even longer. Some winter days we have no options except to be caregivers and get on with our jobs; there are other days though, when we can make choices around how we're going to play the hand we've been dealt when it comes to caring for our ailing loved one. On those days we can decide whether it's going to be Cabin Fever (stressful and negative) or Hibernation (warm and relaxing, like a bear in a den). With that in mind, we're including some suggestions and diversions in this issue that we hope will help you to choose Hibernation. And remember, Spring will be here before you know it!

Bears do it, bees do it, squirrels and snakes do it, so why can't we all just sleep, snuggle and hide out inside until April?

Embracing Winter: How to Stay Happy, Healthy, and Warm



While the winter months can feel long and unrelenting, reflecting on all of the wonderful activities to enjoy during these cold days can help us to "embrace winter". Here are some ideas that focus on the positive things this season brings.

Create a Cozy Sanctuary

There is no shame in hibernating in your house when it's -20 outside! In fact, it's a great opportunity to spend quality time with your loved one(s). Put on some

warm slippers or thick, wooly socks, or stay in your pajamas all day! Buy a microwavable heating bag that you can reheat throughout the day and put at your back, feet, neck, or stomach. These heating bags are also a great way to warm up your bed before you turn in for the night.



Pamper Yourself & Others

Skin care is especially important this time of year, and one small way you can treat yourself or a loved one is by spending time each day to rub lotion on hands, feet, and elbows. It nourishes the skin and also doubles as a massage!

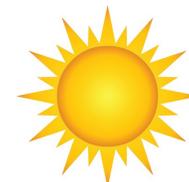
Stay Hydrated

With the dry air and our tendency to keep the thermostat turned up, it is easy to get dehydrated. Warm drinks like herbal tea, hot water with lemon, and even hot chocolate can help you stay hydrated. Eating soups and stews can also increase our fluid intake with the added benefit of keeping us warm!



Soak Up The Sun

In Northwestern Ontario, January and February bring us some of the sunniest days of the year. Even if you can't get outside, you may be able to find a sunny spot in your house where you can sit for a few minutes, close your eyes, and bask in the warmth of the sun's rays.



Surrender
to your
body's
need to
rest

Are you prepared for Northern Ontario winter snowstorms?

(courtesy of mmLearn.org)



Caregivers often feel like they don't have enough time in the day, but failure to plan for winter storms can lead to additional challenges and increased [caregiver stress](#). I know we all hope that we will not receive the amount of snow that Newfoundland did!! But caregivers don't have to be at the mercy of bad weather. These five tips for caregivers will help keep seniors safe when winter weather strikes.

1. Know What's Coming

You can't adequately prepare for a storm if you don't know it's headed your way. Forecasting technology is better today than ever, but the most sophisticated weather prediction is useless if you're not using it. Routinely checking the forecast online or watching the news can help you stay ahead of winter weather.

2. Stock Up

Because grocery stores are likely to be swarmed with people on the night before a big storm, avoid the crowds by stocking up on batteries, food, water, and other supplies well in advance of bad weather's arrival.

Also, keep in mind that you may not be able to get to the store or pharmacy if a storm causes roads to become impassable. Make sure that you have all medical supplies on hand and prescriptions filled when the forecast calls for severe weather. If you do get caught without, check in with your local supermarket -- many do offer delivery service for customers.

3. Plan for Power

If a storm is coming, you have no control over whether or not you'll lose power. While generators are a useful solution, they're not always part of the equation. If you are caring for a senior who is oxygen-dependent, inform your power company, which may be able to offer you priority service or a generator loan. If you rely on an alternate heating source when the power is out, make sure the carbon monoxide alarm is operational.

Make sure all cell phones and laptops are fully charged in case your landline becomes inaccessible. Have contact information on hand for your aging loved one's doctor, the police, and the fire department.

4. Keep Seniors Warm

Seniors are particularly susceptible to cold due to a number of factors including thinner skin, hypothyroidism, arthritis, and other chronic health conditions. Additionally, some [medications](#) can make it harder for seniors to stay warm.

The National Institute on Aging recommends [setting the thermostat at 68 degrees](#) in order to help keep seniors comfortable while preventing hypothermia. Space heaters can also be used as a complement to the furnace, but be sure to closely follow the manufacturer's safety guidelines to reduce the risk of fire.

Caregivers can also help by keeping watch for signs of [hypothermia](#), including sleepiness or confusion; slowed or slurred speech; shallow breathing; a weak pulse; behavioral changes; and poor control over body movements. Shivering may or may not be present. If you do suspect that your aging loved one is suffering from hypothermia and his/her temperature falls to 96 degrees or below, call 911.

If you do lose power, having extra clothing and blankets on hand can help keep seniors safe and warm. Seniors should also be advised to stay inside in extreme cold, snow and ice to help prevent hypothermia as well as [fall-related injuries](#).

5. Have Transportation Covered

With proper planning, seniors and caregivers should be able to hunker down during a storm until it passes. If you or your aging loved one do have to venture out, make sure to bundle up in proper clothing: hats, coats, scarves and breathable layers offer protection from the cold without causing overheating.

Also, arrange in advance for snow removal services, and make sure your vehicle is outfitted with an emergency kit. Not sure what to include? *Consumer Reports* has prepared a handy [list of essential gear for winter weather car travel](#).

While winter weather is a fact of life, winter weather-related stress doesn't have to be. These five tips can help caregivers plan and prepare for whatever Mother Nature sends their way this season.

Walk Like a Penguin - Prevent Winter Trips, Slips and Falls!

Walk like a Penguin means to:

- Have feet wide
- Knees bent
- Arms out for balance
- Wear gloves/mitts
- Dress warm
- Go slow!



<https://www.tbdhu.com/penguinwalk>



BOOK REVIEW

**THE STRANGER IN THE WOODS:
The Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit**
Michael Finkel, Vintage Books, 2018

Submitted by: Susan Bithrey

At first blush, it might not seem to be a good fit to be recommending that caregivers read a book that tells the life story of a modern-day hermit. But think about this for a moment – many (most?) of us, at some point in our caregiving experience, have had days where nothing would suit our purposes better than to be able to simply follow our daydreams, leave home, drive somewhere very far away where no one could find us, and be alone for as long as we wanted.

Meet Christopher Knight, who in 1987 at the age of 20 did exactly that. He wasn't a caregiver, but he apparently was someone who had an insatiable need to get away from his life and everyone in it. He drove his car into the woods of the state of Maine, parked, placed the keys on the dashboard,

and started walking deeper into the wilderness until he arrived at a place where he could set up an isolated and secret campsite. He found that place, and stayed there – for twenty seven years! Alone. Absolutely alone.

This story is true, although it does border on the unbelievable. It is told crisply and entertainingly, by Michael Finkel, who makes few judgements about Knight's story, but simply relates the facts as he was given them in the interviews he conducted with Knight after he was apprehended. For all those years, Knight had never once been spotted, although the locals knew he was out there, creating an air of mystery and some fear among his neighbours about the 'stranger in the woods'. As readers, we get to hear the evidence, puzzle out whether Knight could really have managed to survive for all those years on his own with no fires (even in winter!), and with only the basics that he could scrounge in the area: food, shelter, tools, and utensils. We hear from several experts who speculate about his mental state, and from Knight himself as he discusses his motives and opinions about what he did and why he did it. And there's a fascinating discussion about hermits through the ages. Apparently, they have always been with us. This need to abandon our responsibilities and just be alone is clearly not a new one.

We can't all run away, and even if we did, probably most of us don't really want to go too far, or stay too long. But it's interesting to see what happened to one man who listened to the voice inside himself that not only urged him into solitude, but also talked him into staying there for over a quarter of a century.

“Reading gives us
someplace to go
when we have to stay
where we are”

- Mason Cooley



Give Tokens of Love

Tokens of love can be anything from a caring gesture to a small gift. Surprise your loved one by planning out a day of fun activities, or by giving them a vase of their favorite flowers. A simple token of love is a great way to show your loved one you care. Additionally, you and your loved one can create a token together by crafting some fun Valentine's Day decorations, turning the token into a wonderful bonding experience. (courtesy of IPR Healthcare Systems)

How To Spread Love As A Caregiver for Valentine's Day:

Though it comes with quite a bit of responsibilities, caregiving is an extremely rewarding job. There are so many opportunities to spread happiness to your loved one. We know that caregivers want their loved one to feel cared for during the Valentine's Day season. Here are some ways you can help show love as a caregiver

Be Attentive

One of the simplest ways to show your loved one that you care is by being attentive. Take time to listen to your loved one, and plan activities around what they enjoy doing the most. Turn their favorite hobbies into bonding moments. For example, if your loved one enjoys baking, take some time to bake a delicious heart-shaped cake together this Valentine's Day. Show love by showing your loved one that you are interested in their hobbies, likes, and dislikes.

Empathize & Communicate

Caregiving can be stressful for both your loved one and yourself. While you may feel overwhelmed and become frustrated, your loved one may be stressed about feeling like a "burden." During these times, it's important to show love by empathizing, and putting yourself in your loved one's place. It's also important that you and your loved one communicate. Take time and sit with your loved one to discuss how you feel, or to listen to how they feel. This will provide you with an excellent opportunity to adapt to the changing situation, and your loved one will feel loved knowing that you are willing to communicate with them.

VALENTINES DAY WORD SEARCH

N	A	O	M	S	E	T	A	L	O	C	O	H	C
A	I	E	V	R	N	A	E	D	E	A	O	N	V
C	H	E	R	U	B	N	D	D	I	N	B	N	A
G	E	E	E	N	P	C	N	M	E	E	E	C	L
N	E	V	V	R	R	E	E	N	I	N	G	E	E
E	R	O	E	C	I	E	G	C	E	R	V	E	N
C	T	L	E	R	D	A	T	E	N	S	E	N	T
L	U	E	F	O	P	H	D	E	E	A	U	R	I
A	I	Y	U	M	F	I	H	S	N	V	M	N	N
I	O	A	A	Q	E	C	O	E	L	I	N	O	E
B	T	H	D	O	U	R	E	I	R	M	M	B	R
U	C	L	N	E	D	O	D	I	P	U	C	E	R
E	R	C	O	E	M	B	B	C	R	H	I	C	B
S	C	D	R	O	S	U	R	D	R	B	N	O	I

Words:

Admirer	Love	Cherub
Red Roses	Chocolates	Valentine
Boyfriend	Date	Cupid
Bouquet	Romance	Be mine
Champagne		

Easier-To-Find Information

This "one-stop" website ontario.ca/AgingWell is for seniors across the province. To get this information by phone, call 1-888-910-1000 or 211 - which offers information 24 hours a day.

This Caring Connections Newsletter is edited by: Susan Bithrey, Hilary Mettam,
Deb Riddell & Ruth Wilford

To receive additional copies of this newsletter please contact the CERAH office at (807) 766-7271