

Those alone during the holidays needn't be lonely

BY STACIE CARLSON

Special to the Record-Eagle

With the holiday season upon us, many people are gearing up for food, family and festivities. Although the holidays are traditionally a time for merriment, many people who suffer from loneliness and depression during these times.

"It's important to reach out to people during the holidays," said Patti DeAgostino, director of development and marketing, at Grand Traverse Pavilions in Traverse City. "Holidays, in particular, are a difficult time for those alone or without family and friends."

For many older people, the holidays are a reminder of years gone by and those memories can be saddening. "Senior citizens are often left out during the holiday season," said Laurie Andersen, director at Concord Assisted Living located in Traverse City. "They fall through the cracks. Their families may be out of town, or they may very well have outlived their friends and family. A lot of our seniors don't have strong attachments to immediate family and a lot are left without close camaraderie."

According to Dawn Dornbos, registered nurse and director of Faith Care Network at Faith Reformed Church in Traverse City, the holiday season often heightens the pain of loss due to death, divorce, geographical separation, or relational

conflicts.

Dornbos noted that sadness, loneliness and feelings of disillusionment are typical.

Although many seniors are without a sense of close camaraderie and may be experiencing sadness, area assisted living facilities try to create a community where seniors can feel connected.

"Seniors are already a vulnerable group," said Shelly Skiver, administrator, at Boardman Lake Glens in Traverse City. "They may suffer from physical infirmities and many, if not most suffer from depression. A lot are simply not as mobile as they may once have been. Assisted living offers them a sense of community and helps them feel like they're not alone."

"We try to provide traditions to please everyone. There are a variety of services offered, many different ministers visit and meals are created to be special occasions," said DeAgostino. "It's more than these things, though, that make traditions come alive. We try to remember the little things, too. We have one resident who remembers having a white light on a tree outside of his home. We always put a white light outside of his room window now so he'll be able to enjoy it."

Along with religious ceremonies and decorations, food also reflects tradition. Food often acts as a bridge between people and help seniors share a significant

part of their heritage with others.

"Food is really an extension of seniors," said Andersen. "They have certain dishes that have always been a part of their families. We try to include everyone's particular food in our meals. That way, everything is merged together and honored."

One of the keys to helping alleviate loneliness seems to be keeping busy and area assisted living facilities definitely have a packed schedule.

"There are a lot of activities," added Andersen. "There are crafts, carolers, holiday music, parties and gift giving. We also have many choirs in and area churches and school groups often come in to perform plays."

Other facilities offer weekly lunch clubs, color tours, pianists, indoor activities, including bingo, cards and movies and massage therapy. Bowling, shopping, fishing, swing dances and involvement with the National Cherry Festival and Heritage Parade are also activities in which many seniors participate.

While there are many opportunities for people living in assisted living facilities to interact with others during the holidays, not all seniors live in these settings. For those seniors living on their own, there are also opportunities to visit with people.

"Our Caring Caller



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The Grand Traverse Pavilions in Traverse City hosts a number of holiday events for their residents. Here, a Thanksgiving dinner was recently served; a similar meal is also served for Christmas. Volunteers are encouraged to participate in these events with residents and their families, and the Pavilions' staff.

Ministry team visits our homebound elderly and chronically ill throughout the year," said Dornbos. "During this season we bring a special Christmas basket of goodies and plan extra time with those we visit. Plus, we've just recently formed 55 new small fellowship groups who will reach out to those in their groups who need friendship and comfort during this season."

It's also important for neighbors and friends of seniors who may live alone to watch out for signs of

depression in seniors.

It's normal to feel reflective during the holidays," said DeAgostino. "Watch for individuals who appear to have the blues for long periods of times, though. Sometimes, individuals try to just get through the holidays, but they may experience depression well after the season. It's important to consult with trained professionals about these observations."

Neighbors can also get involved with seniors by volunteering at any of the area assisted living facilities or

for those seniors who live on their own, they can invite these seniors to join them for holiday celebrations.

"Focus on making connections with people, both young and old," added DeAgostino. "Remember that older adults really benefit for interaction, especially intergenerational connection. You can make a real difference and the impact on the individual you are spending time with may be life changing."

Stacie Carlson is a local freelance writer.

Waist not, want not: Avoiding weight gain in the season of plenty

BY KATHRYN REM

Copley News Service

The holiday gravy train is coming.

There's homemade pecan fudge in your office break room begging for attention. Your best friend has arranged a cookie exchange and wants you to take home platters heaped with frosted butter cookies, caramel bars and brownies.

Then there's the holiday lunches and dinners with friends, feasts that wouldn't feel complete without the fried shrimp appetizer and chocolate-raspberry torte for dessert.

The table at your church potluck is laden with temptations like lasagna, cheese soup and sour cream enchiladas.

From Halloween to New Year's Day, the average American gains 10 pounds. Although the temptation to taste is great, weight gain is not inevitable.

Planning is the key, says

Anne Daly, a registered dietitian and certified diabetes educator at the Springfield (Ill.) Diabetes and Endocrine Center.

"It's ridiculous to expect people to abandon their holiday traditions, but they can be modified. We don't want to take the fun out of food."

One simple way to cut back on high-fat food consumption is to fill up with oranges and grapefruit.

"If you're eating oranges and grapefruit, it will absolutely decrease the other stuff that will be going in your mouth."

Prolong eating Christmas dinner until late in the day. She says a typical holiday dinner, including drinks and appetizers, may have 8,000 calories.

"Many families eat early and then haul out the leftovers later in the evening. You're actually eating the big meal twice."

For her own guests and family, Daly sets out vegetable trays, low-fat dip, bagels and fruit for early afternoon eating and schedules the main meal for around 4 p.m.

Keep a pot of vegetable soup in the refrigerator.

"If you have a constant pot ready for meals, you may not be so tempted to order pizza or pick up fried chicken on your way home from shopping."

Daly suggests becoming selective about attending parties.

"Some people get more party invitations than they could enjoy, and it never occurs to them to decline."

When attending potlucks, prepare for a high-fat assault. She recommends bringing something healthy to eat, like a veggie tray or fruit salad.

Experiment to find good-tasting holiday recipes. "Some people have never eaten a fresh sweet potato in their lives or one without brown sugar and marshmallows. Modify recipes to find ones you like."

When modifying recipes, consider eliminating or cutting back on fatty ingredients. Will the taste of your chocolate chip cookies suffer if you decrease the number of chips? Do you really enjoy pecans in the stuffing

or are you just in the habit of adding them? Does the casserole really need a cheese topping?

Neala Ausmus, a registered dietitian, works with compulsive eaters and those who eat for emotional reasons. For them, she recommends relearning the difference between true hunger and a desire for food. People who eat constantly can lose the ability to recognize stomach hunger.

"Try and acknowledge why you're going for food. That awareness can give you control."

Rather than depriving yourself of favorite treats, eat just enough to satisfy hunger, she suggests. You'll feel satisfied and will be less likely to overcompensate by overeating.

Ausmus challenges some conventional diet advice. For example, the age-old hint to eat something before going to a party might not work for compulsive eaters because it may deprive them of foods they love.

"You don't want to go starving, but maybe go hungry and plan on eating. Plan to stop when you are satisfied. Food is more enjoyable when you're hungry."

If there are foods you didn't get to eat at the party, Ausmus suggests asking the hostess if you can take a bit home. You won't feel cheated, and the hostess may be

eager to get the food out of her house.

Another old hint is to wear snug clothing to a party, a reminder that you want to lose weight.

"That might work for some, but for others, it makes them feel fat and guilty, and shame tends to lead to compulsive eating. If you wear something you feel good in, you'll feel better about yourself and when you feel better, you're more apt to treat yourself better," said Ausmus.

Other ways to gain control:

- Undereat one or two days a week to balance occasional overeating.
- Start your meal with a bowl of soup. A Johns Hopkins University study showed that a tomato soup appetizer reduced calorie consumption over the course of an entire meal by 25 percent, compared to a cheese-and-cracker appetizer. Soup takes up more room in your stomach, making you feel full.

- After a big meal, go for a walk. Make it a social outing by asking guests and family members to accompany you.
- Keep a food diary. It will force you to think about your eating.
- Assert yourself at restaurants. If the special comes with cole slaw, ask for a salad substitute.

- Carry supplies. Put a packet of fat-free salad

dressing in your purse to use if the restaurant doesn't offer fat-free dressings.

Carry a pack of sugarless, instant spiced apple cider mix with you; in the restaurant ask for some hot water.

- Do more exercise on the day of a social event. If possible, exercise in the morning to set your mind in "control" mode.

- Don't rush to the food table when you arrive at a party. Greet people you know, get a beverage and settle in first. Survey the table before deciding on the foods you really want.

- Consider yourself successful if you manage to simply maintain your weight during the holidays. Trying to lose weight may be a self-defeating goal.
- Know that the lure of food continues after the holidays.

"We pretend that this only happens once a year," says Daly, noting that food-related celebrations continue throughout the year.

Healthful eating, she says, requires a decision, a commitment and a plan to break bad habits.

"Insanity is doing the same things over and over and over, but expecting the outcome to change."

Eat, don't fret

Visions of sugar plums, baloney. Visions of chocolate candy, holiday cookies and potatoes with plenty of gravy are more like it.

So, how can you enjoy the goodies of the season and not break the scale? Follow these tasty tips:

- Cut calories and double your pleasure by sharing holiday treats with a friend.

- Eat before conquering the mall to avoid going overboard.

- Add nutrition where you can: try peaches on pancakes, load veggies on pizza or top a baked potato with salsa and you'll be free to enjoy a couple of treats.

- Be active and keep moving. Make fitness fun by planning an ice-skating party, skiing or hiking adventures with friends and family.

- Before hitting the buffet table, fill up on fiber-rich foods such as cereal-topped yogurt, whole-grain breads, bran muffins and pretzels.

— Copley News Service

Smart snacking

Eating right is on just about every list of New Year's resolutions. The trick to succeeding is to eliminate temptation where it's at its worst — the refrigerator.

Here are some tips for creating a heart- and health-friendly fridge:

- Take stock of what's inside. Once a month, pull everything out and separate the better-for-you foods from the rest. Don't forget the condiments. Choose more lowfat and fat-free dressings.

- Swap out the fat. Substitute soft or liquid margarine for butter; skim or 1 percent milk for whole milk; lean meats such as chicken and fish for ribs, ground meat and other fattier proteins.

- Stow away desserts and other indulgent foods in the crisper. Healthier foods, such as fruits and vegetables, should be stored in plain sight where you'll be reminded to eat them.

- Divide the fridge into sections of "more often" and "less often" foods.

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