



your to-do list if you don't plan for it. Set aside specific days for baking, shopping, visiting friends and other activities. Line up a shopping buddy and help for party set-up and clean-up. Write out your shopping lists for everything you can think of. This will help eliminate scrambling for last-minute gifts or forgotten items from the store.

Don't overdo it. Learn to pace yourself, you don't need to get everything done in one weekend. I admit, I myself have trouble heeding this advice, trying to remind myself that Rome wasn't built in one day. Learn to say no and commit only to what you truly feel you are able to. Saying yes to something that you should have said no to will leave you resentful and exhausted. Before the holiday gatherings begin, decide on your limits and stick to them to avoid getting overwhelmed. Spend a couple hours at a holiday party instead of all night. To prevent the anxiety that many face during the holidays, allow some time for yourself; even just fifteen minutes of time alone stargazing, listening to music, meditating or deep breathing might just rejuvenate you enough to handle your impending tasks.

Maintain relationships. The holidays are the perfect time to reach out and tell your loved ones that you are thinking of them. Pick one or two relationships you would like to improve and schedule time to catch-up. Take the first step in reaching out to someone you've lost touch with over the years.

Stay healthy. It's hard to control a healthy diet and exercise program when encountered with frigid temperatures and delicious food. Overindulgence during the holidays only adds stress and guilt to the list of holiday stressors. Exercise reduces the levels of stress hormones and stimulates the body's natural mood elevators. Keep a regular meal routine; don't skip meals to prepare for a big dinner or you may find yourself eating more. If you do overindulge on eggnog or gobble up too many turkey trimmings, don't beat yourself up for it.

Embrace the holiday spirit. This season is about gratitude, giving and reflection. When you feel anxiety or worry setting in about getting everything done, re-route your thoughts back to counting your blessings instead. Tell others you value and care about them and take time to reflect on what you are most thankful for in your life.

If your family resembles the Griswold's in "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," just roll with it and enjoy the time spent together. If you find yourself coping by drinking an excess of eggnog, put down your Santa mug, step back and embrace the holiday excitement, taking in everything around you and reflecting on your blessings. You might just find that you have something in common with your quirky Aunt Sally and maybe she isn't so weird after all.

Sources: www.forbes.com, www.mayoclinic.org, www.webmd.com, www.usatoday.com

❖ By Julie Eickhoff

❖ HOSPICE *continued from page 5*

Home team expressed that many things are different at the holidays. The holidays are defined as an amount of time that you are exempt from work or school, usually being spent to do as you wish with your family. The holidays are also when you acquire your family customs and traditions. The holidays for a hospice patient or their family can be a very hard time. The holidays can be a particularly stressful time of the year, adding grief and illness causes patients and families to become overwhelmed with everything happening in their lives. Megan describes the holidays for most people as a fun enjoyable time of year with those warm holiday feelings, but for many bereaved it is the first holiday season being spent without their loved one. Aware of this, the Avera@Home team increases calls and visits around the holidays, assuring the bereaved have all their needs met in the grief process and are coping in a healthy manner.

This time of the year would be a perfect time to make a priceless impression on an individual or their family's lives by volunteering your time. Volunteering for the hospice program is rewarding and an unforgettable experience. Many individuals desire someone to spend a little time with them. Indirectly, many volunteers will establish a lifelong, meaningful friendship with the patient and their family. Volunteering is not only rewarding for the patients, but also for the hospice personnel and volunteers.

Megan expressed that she and the hospice team feel their work is sacred. Megan believes that "we are all just walking each other home." The Avera@Home hospice team believes they receive far more than what they give. These human "Angels" have the quiet courage to face any challenge that presents itself with daily interactions with their patients and families. They provide them with the resources for comfort and a quality of life, while providing symptom management. They advocate and educate their patients and families on what to expect during the dying and grief process, and continue to stay connected with the bereaved families long after their loved one passes. Yet, the Avera@Home team still doesn't feel like they give as much as they receive.

The Avera@home team is honored to be welcomed into patient's homes and lives. They are presented with the family's secrets, pains, and the many successes. Megan expresses Hospice as being an intimate time for the team and the patient. "This is a very vulnerable time in these individuals' lives. They welcome us into their home with trust and respect, and it is incredibly humbling." Megan and the Avera@Home Team express their truly deepest gratitude for the patients and families they have had the opportunity to steward at the end or beginning of their hospice journey.

The Avera@Home Hospice reaches out to so many people throughout the 10 counties they serve. This program is continuing to grow and expand, creating a large support system for anyone experiencing the end of life process. "Grief never goes away or gets easier, it only gets softer."

❖ By Nicole Myers