November 2026

Illinois Extension
The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Extension Connections Newsletter

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Caring for Caregivers: Finding Support During the Holidays

By Kristin Bogdonas,
Illinois Extension food and nutrition educator

November is National Family Caregivers Month, a time to recognize the millions of people who care for aging parents, spouses, relatives, and friends. Caregiving can be rewarding, but it can also bring physical and emotional stress. As the holiday season approaches, added expectations, family gatherings, and traditions can make an already demanding role feel overwhelming.

Give yourself permission to simplify. The holidays do not have to be perfect to be meaningful. Consider scaling back large gatherings, elaborate meals, or traditions that require more time and energy than you can give. Communicate openly with family and friends about your loved one's needs and how celebrations may look different this year. Clear communication can help prevent misunderstandings and encourage others to offer support.

Ask for help and accept it when offered. Family members and friends may be willing to help but unsure what you need. Be specific by asking someone to prepare a meal, clean, decorate, wrap gifts, or spend time with your loved one while you take a break. Even 10 or 15 minutes to listen to music, take a walk, or call a friend can help you recharge.

You do not have to navigate caregiving alone. Illinois offers resources to help caregivers find support and services:

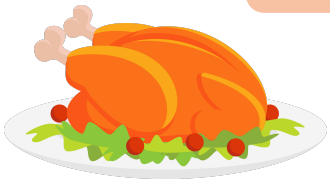
- Illinois Department on Aging Senior Help-Line: Call 1-800-252-8966 to connect with local services, including respite care, support groups, counseling, transportation, and assistance with everyday needs. Illinois' 13 Area Agencies on Aging can also help connect families with community resources.
- University of Illinois Extension: Visit the Caring for Caregivers webpage for research-informed information on recognizing caregiver stress, asking for help, finding respite care, and protecting your well-being.
- Alzheimer's Association: If you care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, call the 24-hour helpline at 1-800-272-3900 for education, support, and guidance.

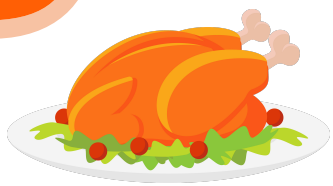
Remember, taking care of yourself is not selfish. Your health and well-being matter, too. This holiday season, let go of perfection and focus on what matters most: meaningful moments with loved ones, accepting help, and making time to recharge.

This month, take one step toward support. Reach out to a local resource, ask someone to help with a task, or schedule a short break for yourself. Small steps can make caregiving more manageable throughout the holidays and beyond.

University of Illinois Extension Caring for Caregivers website- extension.illinois.edu/family/caring-caregivers

Turkey Talk





Safe Preparation, Cooking, Serving and Storing

Choosing your turkey

When selecting a turkey, plan for approximately 1 pound per person for a whole turkey, or slightly less if you're serving multiple side dishes. Fresh and frozen turkeys are both good options, so choose the one that best fits your schedule and storage space. If purchasing a frozen turkey, be sure to allow enough time for safe thawing before cooking.

Thawing your turkey

There are three ways to thaw your turkey safely — in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave oven. Never thaw a turkey on the kitchen counter. Room-temperature thawing can allow harmful bacteria to multiply rapidly.

Cooking your turkey

There are many ways to prepare a turkey, from traditional roasting to grilling and frying. Regardless of the cooking method, food safety should always come first. REMEMBER! Always wash hands, utensils, the sink, and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices with soap and water. Always use a food thermometer to verify your turkey has reached a safe internal temperature before serving.

Keeping your leftovers

Don't take chances with foodborne illness. Discard any turkey, stuffing, and gravy left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours. After the meal, don't let leftovers linger too long. Refrigerate leftover turkey promptly and use it within 3 to 4 days.

Learn more by visiting : extension.illinois.edu/turkey

Building a Balanced Board | Tuesday Nov. 3, 5:30 to 7 p.m.
East Moline Public Library

Join Food and Nutrition Educator Kristin Bogdonas for Building A Balanced Board - a Chatcuterie board program.

Charcuterie boards are fun to eat and make the perfect appetizer for entertaining. Treat your family and friends to a healthy charcuterie board this season by making simple modifications. Learn what a charcuterie board is, what elements go into making a traditional board (or box), and how to adapt your board for different seasons and holidays.

Register online at : go.illinois.edu/BalancedBoard

Get gardening answers from a trusted source

Horticulture Helpline

Illinois Extension Master Gardeners are available in person
Wednesdays, 9 a.m. - Noon.
Call 309-756-9978 or stop by Extension in Milan
321 2nd Avenue West, Milan, Il

Submit your questions **anytime** online at **go.illinois.edu/AskTheMasterGardener** or call to leave a message at **217-300-0240**

Local Government Education Webinar:

Open Meetings Act
Thursday Nov. 5
12 to 1 p.m.

Freedom of Information Act
Thursday Nov. 12
12 to 1 p.m.

University of Illinois Extension will host two educational webinars on the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act, presented by Christopher Boggs, deputy public access counselor with the Illinois Attorney General's Office.

The webinars are open to anyone interested in learning more about FOIA and OMA requirements. Whether participants are experienced and seeking a refresher on recent updates or new to the topics and want to learn the fundamentals, the sessions will provide practical information on the Public Access Counselor's role and the statutes. Attendees will learn about updated resources and tools to help implement these laws at the local level and avoid violations. Time will be reserved for questions and answers. Each session will last 60 minutes.

Presenter: Christopher Boggs, deputy public access counselor, Public Access Bureau, Illinois Attorney General's Office.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/LocalGovWebinar

University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.
If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, contact (309) 756-9978.

Upcoming Community Seminar Series

Beyond the Stigma: Conversations and Care in the Opioid Crisis
Wednesday Nov. 4, 12 to 1 p.m.

Discover practical ways to address opioid-related stigma.

Opioid use disorder affects communities across Illinois and beyond. This session explores how stigma shapes conversations about substance use and whether people seek support and access treatment. Learn how attitudes and language can influence health outcomes and discover practical ways individuals and communities can reduce stigma and support recovery. Presenter: Sami Pierce.

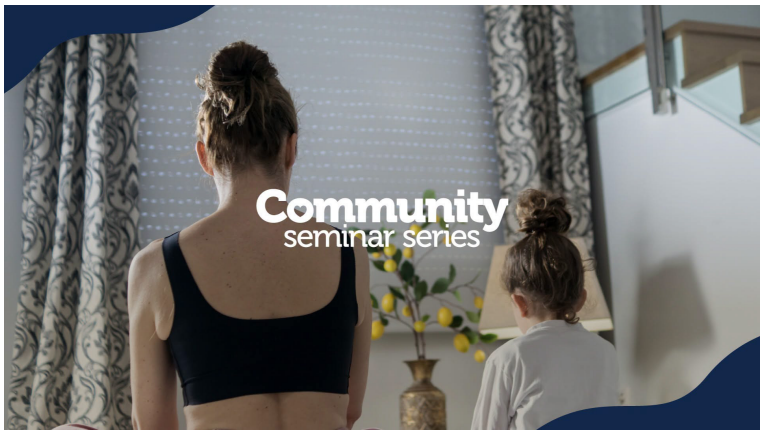
Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026

Understanding the Fear of Falling: Insights for Wheelchair and Scooter Users
Wednesday Nov. 11, 12 to 1 p.m.

Explore ways to better support wheelchair and scooter users.

Fear of falling is a common concern among wheelchair and scooter users, yet it is often overlooked in research and clinical care. This session reviews how clinicians and researchers assess fear of falling and highlights where important gaps remain. Learn how rehabilitation professionals approach these conversations and what can be done to better support mobility, confidence, and quality of life for wheelchair and scooter users. Presenter: Sahel Moein.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026



Embracing Differences: Mindfulness that Supports Families of Neurodivergent Children
Wednesday Nov. 18, 12 to 1 p.m.

Discover how mindfulness can help families of neurodivergent children foster resilience and connection.

Raising a neurodivergent child can bring joys, challenges, and stress to families. This session explores differences in social-emotional development between neurodivergent and neurotypical children, family experiences of raising neurodivergent children, and the potential role of mindfulness in supporting family well-being. Learn how family-centered mindfulness practices can foster awareness, connection, and compassion for both children and caregivers. Presenter: Kai-Ning Wang.

Register online at go.illinois.edu/CSSAutumn2026