

Partners in Care

By Lisa M. Petsche

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Many Ways to Ward Off Cabin Fever

As people in northern climates age, they tend to become less tolerant of winter weather. Medications may make them more sensitive to cold temperatures, and health conditions or disabilities can make it difficult to clear snow. Then there's the risk of slipping and falling on icy pavement and sustaining a serious injury. Older adults may also be nervous about driving in less than favorable conditions and getting in an accident or becoming stranded.

The result of these inconveniences, risks and concerns is that seniors are likely to spend considerably more time at home.

The following are some suggestions for combating cabin fever, for you and the person you care for, during the often-harsh winter months. Even if you're not a caregiver, these ideas are worth checking out.

Ideas for Enjoyment

- Try out a new recipe – perhaps a soup or a stew.
- Order in for a change of cuisine.
- Get a coffee grinder and enjoy the taste of freshly ground coffee in the morning. Stock up on gourmet beans, tea and hot chocolate mix, along with marshmallows for the latter. Don't forget spices for hot apple cider — a perfect treat for wintry nights.
- Bring a bit of nature into your home: nurture some plants or buy fresh flowers.
- Burn candles with rich scents, such as cinnamon, cranberry or vanilla.
- Think warm: read a magazine about a favorite outdoor pastime – gardening or golf, for example; watch summer-themed movies; listen to relaxation CDs featuring your favorite summer sounds – for instance, waves lapping at the shore.
- Look through photo collections or watch home movies. Reminisce about family traditions, special people and places and humorous moments.
- Read a new book or reacquaint yourself with an old favorite you have on hand.
 - Start a daily journal.
 - Work on a jigsaw puzzle or word puzzles.
 - Play card games or board games with others in your household. Go with classic board games such as checkers or chess, or be adventurous and try one of the latest offerings on the market. For even more fun, invite friends over for an afternoon or evening of games and socializing.
 - Start a new hobby, such as sketching or scrapbooking, or revive an old pastime – for example, knitting or crocheting.
 - Get a bird feeder and seed, binoculars and a bird watching guide.



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Many Ways to Ward Off Cabin Fever (cont.)

- Go to the mall, even if you're not looking to buy anything. Window shopping and people watching can be enjoyable pastimes. Have a snack or a meal while you're there.
- Plan an outing to a favorite restaurant. Or be adventurous and try someplace new.
- Attend a concert or the theater. Take a taxi – or book accessible transportation if necessary – to ensure door to door service.

Practical Activities

Accomplishment, especially when it involves tackling long-postponed projects, brings satisfaction and a sense of renewal. Involve the care receiver as appropriate.

Some ideas for projects:

- -Organize your collection of photos, music or movies.
- Do some decluttering around your home; kitchen drawers, closets, spare rooms, basements and attics are typical hot spots. Bag or box unwanted items for donation to a local charity.
- Organize paperwork – bills, medical documents and so on – in portable file boxes or three-ringed binders equipped with dividers.
- Rearrange the furniture in one or more rooms, or swap furnishings and accessories among rooms. Or start planning a major room redecorating or home renovation project.
- Make an extra effort to look after your health, including exercising regularly – good for both your physical and mental well-being. A stationary bike or treadmill is a good choice — you can use it year-round, regardless of the weather.
- When weather conditions permit, try out a mall walking program. They usually operate in the early morning and may or may not be daily. Information can be obtained at the customer service kiosk. If the person you care for can't walk very far, or at all, they can sit in a central area, have a coffee and people watch.
- Research community support services, including respite care options, and plan to start taking advantage of them in the spring - or right away if you feel you're wearing down. Information can be obtained from the local office on aging.
- If it's feasible, start planning a trip for next winter, to a mild climate. Even if it may not end up happening, fantasizing about your "dream vacation" can be lots of fun.