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Bring Grandma the Joy of the Season: United Hebrew of New Rochelle Shares Top 9 Holiday Gifts for Seniors

Experienced Caregivers Share Gift Ideas for the Elderly, from Seniors Living Independently to Loved Ones with Dementia

Plus, a Senior and Her Daughter Chime in

(New Rochelle, NY—December 4, 2015)...If you're about to buy another candy dish or scarf for grandma, wait. Many seniors live in smaller spaces than they used to, with less use for new tchotchkes and collectibles. And they may not need much in the way of new clothes.

There's a better way to brighten grandma's holiday. With a little creativity, and an understanding of the challenges your elderly loved one faces, you'll find a gift that does more than bring a smile – it might change a life. The eldercare experts at United Hebrew of New Rochelle, with its full range of geriatric services, are brimming with ideas for ideal gifts for all seniors, from those independent enough to live on their own to those affected by dementia.

"Finding just the right gift for a beloved senior is a great way to show that you are thinking of them," Nora O'Brien, PT, DPT, Executive Director of Willow Towers Assisted Living, a part of United Hebrew of New Rochelle's campus of comprehensive care, where the staff is dedicated to improving the lifestyles for seniors and helping them enjoy the highest quality of life. "Of course, there's nothing like a visit around the holidays to brighten someone's day. But it's the season of giving, and when it comes to buying gifts, seniors have certain needs that gift givers can keep in mind."

There are many gifts that can enhance a senior's life. Here are eight types of presents to consider:

1. **Favorite personal products:** For a senior in a nursing home, where residents can't always choose the brands of products they receive, creams, soaps and other products in their favorite brands can be a delight. RoseMary Mahoney of

Carmel, New York, stocks her mother Margaret Daleo's room at United Hebrew's skilled nursing facility with her favorites—Dove soap, Oil of Olay lotion and Life Saver candies. "I've been using Oil of Olay for 50 years," Ms. Daleo says. "It keeps my skin soft."

2. **Pastimes:** Magazines and books in large print are good choices for avid readers, and large print adult coloring books with a set of art markers is a great gift and a relaxing activity, says Patricia McCormack, Vice President of Nursing and Clinical Services at United Hebrew. Seniors may also appreciate a magnifying glass for reading, perhaps one that is lighted and comes in a decorative pouch. Thinking games such as Scrabble and Boggle, as well as books of crosswords, word-searches and Sudoku can help keep the mind sharp. "Games also help in making social connections, which helps seniors thrive," says Ms. McCormack.
3. **Technology:** Tablets and iPads are not just for the young. With features adjusted for senior citizens, such as large letters and buttons, they can be important social lifelines—and crucial in emergencies. Plus, a FaceTime call on an iPad can be a great way to connect when an in-person visit is not possible. "A CD player or iPod allows you to choose the music your parent or grandparent has always loved, rather than relying on someone else's taste in music," adds Ms. McCormack.
4. **Comfort items:** For elders affected by Alzheimer's or related dementias, Teddy bears or other stuffed animals can be a great comfort, says Ms. McCormack. Soft, fluffy, fire-retardant clothes work well, too. "You basically need to look at the individual that you're buying for and think about what interests the individual has and what they liked to do prior to coming into the facility. That carries over into later life," she says.
5. **Devices with large buttons:** Large-button phones and remotes are popular for people with weaker vision and less mobility with their hands, says Ronni Siegel, Director of Operations at Willow Towers Assisted Living. "Don't give them a smart phone that their arthritic hands can't manage," she says.
6. **Easy-to-use gadgets:** Grabbers for reaching things off the floor or down from a shelf, and electric can openers that open the can with one hand, leaving no sharp edges, are helpful, as are accessories for walkers such as pouches, cup holders and universal trays. For those who enjoy poker, pinochle or canasta, playing card holders allow the games to be played without tiring arthritic hands. Easy-grip utensils help seniors eat meals more comfortably, but Ms. Siegel cautioned that some people feel self-conscious using them in front of others.
7. **Mobility aids:** A reclining chair with a power lift makes it easy for a senior to get in or out. Also helpful: a "bed cane," which is a kind of railing used to rise from the mattress, says Ms. Siegel. "Very often as we get older, just making the

transition from lying down to sitting up can be daunting,” she says. Even a riser for a toilet seat—not the first thought that comes to mind with the holidays—can be a much-appreciated aid. “It’s not a glamorous gift,” Ms. Siegel says. “But it’s very useful. Very practical.”

8. **Photo displays:** Snapshots of treasured family moments, milestones, or vacations are wonderful remembrances, notes Ms. Daleo, who has eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Her daughter, Ms. Mahoney, suggests selecting a few photos and presenting them with a corkboard and set of pushpins as a simple way to display and rearrange favorite photos. Personalized photo gifts such as mugs, photo books, and photo jigsaw puzzles are fun, too.
9. **Time.** No other gift can bring the smiles that come with a personal visit. A grandparent might particularly enjoy visits from a maturing grandchild who pledges to come over and make dinner or take a grandparent to lunch. To present it as a gift, Ms. Siegel suggests creating a book of coupons promising the visits.

The bottom line is this: as with all gifts, put some thought about whom you’re buying for, and how a gift might help. If that senior lives in a senior housing, assisted living, or skilled nursing setting, consult with his/her caregivers who are experienced and have tremendous insights into what will make their lives easier, and more enjoyable, Ms. Siegel says.

“Grandma doesn’t want a gift card,” Ms. Siegel says. “With the right gift, you’re lightening the load for your loved one, making life a little easier, maybe even helping the person live independently a little longer.”

Adds O’Brien: “The holidays are a time of joy and togetherness, and to show our loved ones how special they are to us.”

About United Hebrew

United Hebrew of New Rochelle (uhgc.org) is a vibrant not-for-profit, non-sectarian, multi-service campus of comprehensive care nestled on 7.5 acres. United Hebrew has been serving the Westchester metropolitan area since 1919, and today, works with more than 1,000 clients daily. Services include: **Long-Term Skilled Nursing; Burke Rehabilitation at United Hebrew; Willow Towers Assisted Living** (*The Beverly and Alfred J. Green Pavilion*, and The Phoenix Neighborhood and Griffin Program—Memory Support Programs for Alzheimer’s care and Related Dementias); **Independent Senior Housing** (*Low-Savin Soundview Senior Apartments*); **Health at Home** (AZOR Licensed Home Health Care and a Certified Home Health Agency); and **Private Geriatric Care Management Services** (Raven Care Advocates). For more information, call (914) 632-2804 or visit www.uhgc.org.