



Tips for Managing Stress During the Holidays

The holidays can be stressful for anyone, let alone someone dealing with a diagnosis of cancer.

In the privacy of your own heart, do you sometimes dread holiday chaos and the thoughts of coping with it on top of coping with cancer? This time of year can be physically cluttered and emotionally stressful, even without cancer in the picture. Here are some easy strategies to try to make your home peaceful and joyous this season.

- ▲ **Quick Routines:** Try to get into the habit of a 10-minute tidy before bed—spend ten minutes folding blankets, gathering remotes, taking out recycling and trash and clearing off kitchen counters. Start the dishwasher. Pick up and put coats and shoes away as you straighten the entry of your home. It doesn't take long, but it will make your home a more pleasant place to wake up to!
- ▲ **Simplify holiday decorating:** This will also simplify cleaning during this season. Bring out a few of the most important pieces and the larger pieces. If you decide you have too many holiday decorations, joyfully give them to younger family members or friends who are just starting to celebrate the holidays in their homes. You can add a special note and with the date so that they think of you each year as they decorate and enjoy this special gift.
- ▲ **Drop the perfectionism:** “Good enough” truly is sufficient. Don't be afraid of dust bunnies—many of us no longer see well enough to see them! Don't be afraid to close doors, especially those leading to teenage bedrooms or little-used rooms or an upstairs. If guests aren't likely to wander there, don't worry about those areas!
- ▲ **Simplify food and entertaining:** Keep menus simple and encourage guests to each bring an item. Or consider picking up a restaurant or store-bought main course, side dish or dessert. Plan a game or activity like stringing popcorn or watching a holiday movie together to emphasize quality time or relaxation.
- ▲ **Refocus gift giving:** The best gift we can give our loved ones and ourselves is the gift of time. The get-together is more important than the exchange of stuff. We know this in our hearts. If you want to buy for several people, you can use one idea over and over, if possible. In addition, shift the focus to spending time together.
- ▲ **The secret to annual success:** After the holidays, take some notes about what worked and didn't work for you this year and maybe start a holiday folder. This will help you get closer to your holiday wishes for next time. Reading a prior year's notes will help renew your resolve each year and help you plan better for yourself.
- ▲ **Just for you:** Plan some pampering for you during this stressful time of the year. Get a manicure, pedicure or a massage. Take a nap. Set aside time to chill and read a book. Watch your favorite holiday movie. You can do these things on your own or with a friend or family member. If you are nurturing yourself and giving yourself some TLC, then you will be less stressed and feel better!



Tips for Managing Stress During the Holidays for Caregivers from the perspective of a Survivor

- ▲ **Survivors may get more excited about the holidays than they used to.** After dealing with cancer, a lot of survivors really want something to look forward to. After experiencing trauma or stress, survivors may want to bring focus back to something positive. Oftentimes, the holidays are the perfect opportunity to add some joy to their lives.
- ▲ **Some survivors may not be as enthusiastic about the holidays as they were before cancer.** The pressure of being “merry” and “joyful” can be difficult while being in the midst of something that may be emotionally or physically challenging. Please don’t take it personally if your survivor starts to withdraw during what used to be their favorite holiday traditions.
- ▲ **Holiday meals may be different for survivors.** Between the change in taste buds, the presence of metallic taste, nausea, mouth sores or a lack of appetite or other side effects, survivors may not be able to enjoy meals like they used to. One suggestion is to make mealtimes about something more than the food that you eat. Rather, make it all about the company that you keep.
- ▲ **Spending time with those we love is the best gift of all.** If you’d still like to have something for your survivor to unwrap, a small thoughtful gift that can be enjoyed even on the lowest of days, may be a special way to remind your survivor that you are thinking about them throughout the year.