



Tips for Coping with Cancer During the Holidays

- ✓ **Prepare yourself emotionally.** It is common for feelings to surface and for emotions to become magnified at this time of year. You may feel a mixture of anticipation, disappointment, and apprehension. Preparing yourself for these emotions can help you better deal with them when they arise.
- ✓ **Keep it simple.** If you are in the middle of cancer treatment, many tasks such as cooking, shopping and decorating can become overwhelming. Taking on too much will only make the holidays more stressful. You may find that simpler, smaller gatherings are easier to manage. Keeping your expectations realistic and manageable can help reduce stress.
- ✓ **Pace your activities.** Don't feel obligated to participate in every holiday activity. You may decide to decline some invitations so you have energy to enjoy the activities that are most important to you. Also, don't feel bad about cancelling plans at the last minute, or taking time to yourself if you need it.
- ✓ **Know your physical limitations.** Be aware of the physical stress that entertaining and travel can put on your body. If you are going out of town to visit relatives or friends, consider staying in a hotel. This may give you more time to relax and also help you feel control over the situation. Pay attention to how much rest you need so you do not overextend yourself. Do not feel guilty saying no to events for this is a good time to practice this habit if it is not a natural one.
- ✓ **Anticipate reactions from others.** Cancer can change the way you relate to your loved ones and the way they relate to you. You may be dealing with side effects from cancer treatment, such as hair loss, weight loss and other changes to your appearance. If you are worried about how others will react to seeing you, consider writing a letter, sending an e-mail or calling family members in advance to let them know how you are feeling. It is also good to decide in advance how you will respond to questions about your health! If you have your response ready, this can help to decrease your anxiety and may help reduce some of the awkwardness when you do get together.
- ✓ **Discover new traditions.** Try not to put too much pressure on yourself to maintain your old holiday traditions. Plan with your loved ones which traditions to include and which to let go of this year. Most of all, do what is right for you in the here and now to make the holidays rich and full of celebration. You may rediscover happiness in old and new ways.
- ✓ **Share your feelings.** Expressing your feelings, needs, and concerns with others can help reduce the stress of the holidays. Your friends and family may avoid talking with you, because they are unsure of what to say or how to treat you. If you do not want to talk about cancer, let your loved ones know. If you feel a need to cry or get upset, it's okay to do so. Communicating your feelings with others can help you feel less alone and more connected.
- ✓ **Set goals for the New Year.** Your dreams and hopes for the future may be different now. Things that seemed important before your diagnosis can yield new priorities, such as enjoying more time with your friends and family. Make new, short-term goals (e.g., finishing cancer treatment) and long term goals as well. Re-evaluating your priorities can help improve your outlook and make your next year the best year yet!
- ✓ **Remember the meaning of the holidays.** Try not to focus on what may be missing or what is different about this year's holiday season. Be kind to yourself and practice simplicity this year. Try to focus on what the holidays are truly about: a time of sharing with others, being thankful, renewing relationships, and appreciating life.

Portions of this section were created by Hope Navigators®