

COPING WITH CANCER DURING THE HOLIDAYS

By Melissa, M. Thompson, MSW, LCSW

TIPS FOR SAVING ENERGY AND ENJOYING THE SEASON

The holidays remind us to take time to celebrate and step out of the every day to enjoy time with our loved ones. When you are a cancer survivor or caregiver, you may be wondering how to manage the holiday season while coping with cancer.

Concerns of how to manage fatigue, nausea, and the physical changes that are a result of your treatment may be on your mind. You also may be wondering how you will cope with the busyness of the season, when coping with cancer has made you feel busy enough.

Here are some tips for coping with cancer during the holidays:

PREPARE PHYSICALLY

- ***Keep expectations realistic***
Delegate! Don't be afraid to ask for help. You will be giving a gift to the folks who really do want to help you during this time.
Keep a list on hand of things you may need help with so that when offers to help come in you will be able to respond
- ***Know your physical and emotional limitations and plan for rest breaks***
Learn to say no and focus on what is most important to you.
- ***Communicate your limitations***
- ***Exposure to seasonal illnesses***
It's important to protect yourself from these seasonal germs. Ask your treatment team for guidelines regarding when you may be at higher risk for catching seasonal illnesses – and follow them
- ***Modify traditions***
While we may not like change, modifications of traditions can help you conserve your energy and stamina. Consider sending out a holiday email instead of sending out cards, do some on line shopping instead of going to the mall, and ask for help with decorating and meal preparations.
- ***Alcohol***
Use caution and discuss with your treatment team to understand any side effects from your treatment. Keep in mind that alcohol dulls feelings, but only temporarily.

PREPARE EMOTIONALLY

- ***Talking about cancer***
You might feel like you need to share your entire treatment history, but you don't. Only share what you feel comfortable sharing. Cancer does not need to be the focus of any celebration. Statements like, "Thanks so much for your concern but we have declared this holiday a cancer free one. How are you and your family doing?" may help redirect the conversation to the celebration at hand.
- ***Acknowledge your expectations of yourself & keep expectations manageable***
- ***Plan carefully***
- ***Prioritize what is important to you***
- ***Be prepared for strong emotions at times***
- ***Communicate***
What you will participate in & what you won't
- ***People***
Surround yourself with supportive people, not those who drain you

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- ***Reflect***
On the meaning behind the holiday. What does it mean to you?
- ***Avoid canceling the holidays***
Take time to be alone but avoid isolating yourself.

If you are finding yourself struggling emotionally during this holiday season, ask for some help. There are many professionals available who are trained to support cancer survivors and their families. Ask your treatment team to put you in contact with a social worker or other professional with experience in oncology.

This is your holiday! Let it have meaning for you and your family!

Melissa M. Thompson is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who specializes in working with cancer survivors and their families. She is a Clinical Specialist at Living Anew Cancer Support Services in St. Charles, IL and a professor in the graduate school of Social Work at Aurora University. She can be reached at Melissa@livinganew.org or 630 730 1828.