Cancer during the Holidays

With the holidays quickly approaching, this time of year can sometimes be overwhelming. It’s a season to spend quality time with our family and friends. There’s an abundance of holiday parties, gift giving, and celebrating traditions. However, sometimes cancer can cause a rift in the holiday season. Those with cancer, along with their families, may feel out of sync from their normal holiday routine. Many questions will be prompted during this time of year. How do I take care of the holiday rush and take care of myself? How do I stay present with my loved ones when I have so many other things on my mind? What will the New Year bring? Sharing your concerns with those who care for you can help you feel better connected.

If you or a loved one has cancer during this holiday season, try some of these suggestions to alleviate potential stress.

- Allow yourself to express your feelings. Whether it’s happiness, sadness, joy or fear, give yourself permission to express those emotions. Don’t pressure yourself with expectations or force yourself to be happy just because it’s the holidays.
- Find new and innovative ways to make the holidays easier. Try online shopping this year or suggest a potluck where everyone brings their favorite holiday dish.
- Be sure to take care of yourself. Continue to eat well-balanced meals,
use physical activities to release tensions, and get plenty of sleep.

- Allow distractions. Sometimes going to a movie, dinner with friends, playing games, or other fun activities is all you need to feel reconnected.

- Identify activities that lift your mood. Hot baths, afternoon walks, and naps are just a few of life’s simple pleasures.

- Prepare for the holidays. Don’t try to do too much in one day. Decide which traditions are feasible and possibly create new traditions.

- Stick to a budget as you shop during the holidays. Understand that buying things will not get rid of any negative feelings you might encounter.

- Ask for help! Your loved ones want to provide support.

- Allow yourself to say no. Unburden yourself from obligations.

If you’re grieving during the holidays, this time of year can be even more difficult. Give yourself permission to feel pain. Working through the grief is important, but it’s also fine to allow distractions and engage in activities you enjoy.

Remember that you do not have to continue your journey alone. Talk with your loved ones and allow yourself to enjoy one another. The Patient Ambassador Program is also a great resource to connect with those who’s walked in your shoes. Our program is filled with willing volunteers who know exactly what you’re experiencing this holiday season. If you feel you could benefit from speaking with someone, we are here to provide you with that support.

To get connected, please contact: Shirley Tejidor, Program Manager at Stejidor@ucsd.edu.

Remind that you do not have to continue your journey alone. Talk with your loved ones and allow yourself to enjoy one another.

Testimonies from our Ambassadors

Words of Encouragement

“We all put so much pressure on ourselves and tend to forget what the holiday is really about. Focusing on loved ones, enjoying the lights and decorations, and sharing meals with friends and family are what it’s all about.

Since my surgery was in October I had to ask for a lot of help over the holidays. I usually entertain both Christmas Eve (with my dad) and Christmas day (with my husband’s family and my mom and sister). We decided to go out to dinner for the Eve and everyone brought something on Christmas Day. Everyone was so understanding and helpful. I learned to ask for help and not to try to do it all myself.”

-Lori McIntosh, cancer survivor

After losing my husband to lung cancer in May 2014 and then being diagnosed with appendiceal cancer less than 6 months later, I would say it has been quite a journey.

Today, after successful surgery and HIPEC at UCSD with Dr. Andrew Lowy, I am so focused on living life to the fullest each and every day. Remember that it is perfectly fine to treat yourself and enjoy life’s simple pleasures with friends and family.

-Susan Synders, cancer survivor

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