Cancer and the Holidays

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [1], October / 2012

Listen to the Cancer.Net Podcast: Cancer and the Holidays [2], adapted from this content.

The holidays are a busy time and often introduce a variety of challenges for people and families coping with cancer. These tips can help:

Keep things simple. In previous years, you may have been the one to do most of the holiday decorating, shopping, cooking, baking, and entertaining. This year, you may need to scale back your activities and focus on one or two traditions that are special to you. Let your family and friends know what your expectations are so they can help and offer their support.

If holiday shopping is a source of stress, make alternate plans to shop online, order from catalogues, give gift certificates, or ask a friend to do some shopping for you. Consider wrapping gifts in gift bags or using gift-wrapping services in stores and shopping malls.

If you are worried about the finances involved in holiday shopping, keep in mind that heartfelt, homemade gifts and "thinking of you" notes go a long way to let someone know you are thinking of them. A wrapped gift is not the only way to show appreciation.

Ask for help. If the task of cooking a large family meal seems daunting, then ask for help with set up and clean up, have each person bring a dish to share, or order food to go from a store or restaurant. You may consider making restaurant reservations. Remember, getting together with the people you care about is more important than the food. Family and friends will gladly play a role in your celebration and may feel flattered that you asked for their input and contribution.

Learn your limitations and accept them. Carefully schedule your visits to and from friends and be aware of the physical stress that entertaining and traveling puts on your body so you do not overextend yourself. Use discretion when selecting which holiday party invitations to accept.

If you are visiting relatives or friends out of town, consider staying in a hotel instead of in a family member's home. This may offer you more opportunities to relax and restore your energy and give you more control over your space and time. Read more about what to consider when traveling with cancer [3].

Avoid guilt and be true to yourself. Savor the good times, but feel free to take time to grieve if you need to. Let others support you, listen, and show that they care. If necessary, talk to a friend, loved one, or counselor [4] about what you are feeling. Learn more about letting go of guilt [5].

Try your best to be patient with friends and family members that pressure you to act more cheerful throughout the holiday season. Remind them that the holidays do not offer a respite from the challenges cancer poses, and sometimes the season adds pressure to put on a happy face, when, in reality, you may be feeling more distress than joy.

Remember the true meaning of the holidays. Finally, don't concentrate on what may be missing, what tradition wasn't kept, or what may be different about this year's holiday season from years past. Try to focus on the present moment and enjoy your celebration in whatever form it takes. Remember what the holidays are truly about?a time for renewed friendships, being thankful, and sharing with others.

More Information

Coping With the Holidays: Common Questions [6]

Relationships and Cancer [7]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Multimedia/Podcasts/Files/Cancer_and_the_Holidays.mp3
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24707
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24699
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24491
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24488
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/25112