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Five Ideas for Maintaining Your Holiday Cheer [1]

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The sprint to the New Year is well underway?shopping, decorating, baking, visiting with friends and family. When you add in doctor's appointments and treatments, it's no wonder there seems to be so much going on this time of year! And while it's impossible to completely get rid of the extra stress brought on by the busy holiday season, here are five things to consider if you also find yourself coping with cancer during the holidays.

(1) Find the joy in simplicity.

In previous years, you may have been the one to do most of the holiday decorating, shopping, cooking, baking, and entertaining. This year, you might need to scale back your activities so you can focus on the one or two holiday traditions that matter the most. This might mean, you decide to:

- Do your shopping online, order from catalogues, give gift certificates, or ask a friend to do some shopping for you.

- Wrap gifts in gift bags or using gift-wrapping services in stores and shopping malls.
- Make heartfelt, homemade gifts or write personalized notes to let your loved ones know how much you appreciate them.
- Reduce the amount of time you spend in the kitchen by ordering holiday treats, or even the entire meal, from your favorite bakery, restaurant, or grocery store.
- Ask someone else to host the holiday festivities this year.

Which brings us to our next point?

(2) Ask friends and family for help.

If your list of holiday tasks becomes too much or you could just use an extra set of hands, reach out to your friends and family. For example, ask a group of friends to come over to put up decorations around your house and then stay for coffee or hot chocolate afterward. Or, have each person bring a special dish to share for a large family meal. Remember, getting together with the people you care about is more important than the food or decorations. Family and friends will gladly play a role in your celebration and may feel flattered that you asked for their input and contribution.

(3) Take care of yourself.

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. Be selective about which holiday party invitations you accept, and don't feel guilty if you have to decline (even at the last minute).

If you are visiting relatives or friends out of town, consider staying in a hotel instead of a family member's home. This may give you more chances to relax and restore your energy, and it will also give you more control over your space and time.

(4) Give yourself permission to feel and express all of your emotions.

The holiday season often adds pressure to put on a happy face, when in reality, you may be feeling more distress than joy. Savor the good times, but feel free to take time to grieve or reflect if you need to. Let others offer their support and show that they care. Sometimes, though, friends and family members may be less than understanding and pressure you to act more cheerful throughout the holiday season. Try to be patient, but also remind them (in a way that feels comfortable to you) that the holidays are not a vacation from the challenges of living with cancer.

(5) Celebrate the true meaning of the holidays.

Finally, don't concentrate on what might be missing from the holiday table, what tradition wasn't kept, or what might 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.

For more tips on coping with cancer during the holidays, listen to this podcast with Dr. Lidia Schapira.

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