

# TOP TIPS

## Ideas to Help Enjoy the Festive Season

Coping with the Christmas holiday period can be demanding at the best of times, and when you or a loved one is dealing with cancer or other health challenges, you may feel like cancelling it all together!

Whether you are processing a cancer diagnosis, going through treatment or adjusting to life post-cancer, you may notice feelings of loss, anxiety or sadness. The festive holiday season may involve more socialising and traditions and reflection on the year that has passed, all of which can be a reminder of how much life may have changed. Here are some ideas that others have shared to help them navigate this time as smoothly as possible:

- 1. Raise concerns early:** If you are worried about how you will manage a particular symptom or health concern, it may be worth asking your GP, nurse or specialist if there is anything they can suggest. They may be able to adjust medications or treatment to help you. You won't know unless you ask!
- 2. Be kind to yourself:** Try to avoid putting pressure on yourself to take on all the tasks and events you would normally do, or expect yourself to do everything for an unwell family member. Only take on a realistic amount of tasks, delegate tasks, and try to recognize critical self-talk. Try to keep up your usual self-care activities such as your exercise routines, meditation, or quiet times to yourself.
- 3. Manage expectations & get creative:** Think about what you can realistically manage in the lead up to the holidays and share this with your loved ones. Remember, despite all you may be juggling there are likely to be some moments of joy and fun. Notice what is still possible and savour the enjoyable moments - try to connect with these, rather than what has changed or may not be possible this year. Consider a range of ways you can be involved in the celebrations even if you cannot participate as actively as you usually would, for example, consider buying gifts online or sending e-cards instead of Christmas cards. You may like to "Skype in" or "phone in" to some celebrations if you are not feeling up to attending. Many people may find friends are away in January while they are feeling tied to hospital appointments – reach out to others who are still around to plan some activities. When you are with others and they ask what they can do – have some ideas ready to share!



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**4. Rest & pace yourself:** Make sure you make time to rest – it's important for your physical health, but it may also help you to feel calmer, less overwhelmed and better able to enjoy activities. Social contact can be exhausting too, pace yourself so that you actually enjoy the times with others.

Don't keep going until you feel exhausted – we know it's often harder to manage our emotions and keep positive perspective when we are tired. Set some boundaries and try to be politely assertive with others so you don't find yourself having conversations that you would prefer not to have over a forkful of turkey or glass of bubbles!

- 5. Have an "exit" strategy:** Plan a way to leave events if you feel overwhelmed, unwell or overly fatigued. This may mean notifying the people you are going with that you may leave early, making sure you will be able to contact a taxi or Uber, or having someone nearby who can pick you up. It's often helpful to say you will just "pop in" or come for a short while so its not too exhausting, and you can always stay longer if you feel OK.
- 6. Treat yourself:** Inject some fun and enjoyment into your holiday period by picking some special things to do during this time. It may be as simple as sitting down in a café to read a magazine or going for a gentle walk or yoga class. You may like to organize a massage, see a movie, go to a nice lookout or just spend time in your garden or nature.
- 7. Use your supports:** Knowing that you have supports to contact when you face physical or emotional challenges can make the holiday period easier.
- Chat to trusted family or friends if you feel comfortable. This tends to help reduce feelings of isolation and help you feel better supported.
  - Think about what strategies have been helpful at other times of stress – can you look at using some of these at the moment?
  - If you are in contact with a psychologist, social worker or counsellor, make a plan with them as to how you will manage the holiday season.
  - The Cancer Council offers telephone support with cancer nurses on 13 11 20, and online support 24 hours a day via its Cancer Council Online Community.
  - Make sure you know who in your treating team to contact over the holiday period with medical concerns and find out when your GP is open over the Christmas period so that you have this information before closing periods begin.

*For immediate emotional support: Please contact Lifeline Australia for immediate support if you are feeling distressed; Lifeline is free to call, open 24 hours a day and can be reached on 13 11 14 or online at <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>. If you are struggling with low mood or anxiety throughout the holiday period, you can reach out to Beyond Blue. Beyond Blue is a free service, available 24 hours a day on 1300 22 4636 or through their website <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>. If you need immediate mental health support or are worried about a friend or family member in NSW contact NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511, or in an emergency go to your local hospital or call 000.*



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