

Cancer, Covid and Coping Through the Holidays

Experiencing a cancer diagnosis can create changes to your usual ways of celebrating the holidays. Throw in a pandemic and you can count on some new ways of celebrating the holidays. Here are some tips and tools to assist in coping and managing stress during upcoming celebrations.

Plan Ahead

Plan early so you can “cope ahead” and have several options in case things change. Here are some guidelines to consider when thinking of upcoming events:

- The CDC guidelines for keeping cancer patients safe: <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/staying-well-at-home.htm>
- The CDC guidelines for celebrating the holidays: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

Pace Yourself

Both during and after treatment you may not have energy to do your usual activities. Try to balance activity and rest. Give yourself permission to “do less” and delegate. Here is a video on cancer related fatigue: <https://youtu.be/cnC6gMU8NGs>

Communicate

You may worry about seeing family and friends for the first time since treatment. Concerns about physical changes, such as hair loss or weakness, or what to tell other’s about your illness. Take time to phone or email those you may see to help prepare them for changes. It is ok to plan ahead of time what you will tell people about your illness so you do not feel pressure in the moment.

Ask for What You Need

Be open and honest with family and friends about what would really help you: food delivery, meal prep, transportation, housecleaning, music or movie channel subscriptions, other wish list items. Websites to help coordinate and organize assistance and connection for patients and caregivers:

- <https://lotsahelpinghands.com/>
- <https://www.mylifeline.org/>
- <https://www.caringbridge.org/>
- <https://www.standwithapp.com/>
- <https://www.care.ly/> An App called Care.ly

Acknowledge Your Feelings

Give yourself permission to grieve and reflect on things that are different this year. It’s ok to feel sadness and disappointment with all the changes, especially if you are not able to visit with those you love the most. Here are some tools to help cope with the emotions and stress. Here is a link for emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/forty-healthy-coping-skills-4586742>

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Take Care of Yourself

When feelings get overwhelming be sure to be kind to yourself. What would you tell your friend or loved one to do if they were hurting? Here are some Hoag Health YouTube videos from our Oncology Team, that address nutrition, exercise and stress reduction:

- Optimizing Health During and After Cancer Treatment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZkzJtPg9S0>
- QiGong for Cancer Patients: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_5OurVMpCE
- Special Cooking Class for Cancer Patients: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bf2yNzyGU6M>
- Stress Management for Those with Cancer: <https://youtu.be/byAFko7DCv4>
- Eating for Energy Two Part Series: <https://youtu.be/4on1o0uR5Ks> and https://youtu.be/ARGFv8_v68E
- Take a Stretch and Meditation break: <https://youtu.be/XpOdRVs1PFQ>

Tools to help you cope with the stress and isolation:

- Deep breathing
- Gratitude list
- Meditation
- Writing in a journal
- Practicing daily affirmations

<https://www.premierhealth.com/your-health/articles/healthnow/25-stay-at-home-self-care-ideas-during-covid-19>

New Traditions

Focus on ways to create or adapt traditions, instead of ruminating on what is being “missed”. Discuss with your family and loved ones what really matters, and what can be skipped this year:

- Host a Virtual Thanksgiving: <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology/info-2020/virtual-thanksgiving.html>
- Virtual Christmas Party (Holiday) Ideas: <https://museumhack.com/virtual-christmas-party/>
- Hanukkah during Covid: <https://www.realsimple.com/holidays-entertaining/holidays/hanukkah/how-to-celebrate-hanukkah-during-coronavirus>
- Order premade meals:
 - See if your favorite restaurant is making celebration/holiday meals to go.
 - Gelson's: <https://www.gelsons.com/>
 - Costco: <https://www.costco.com/fresh-food.html>
 - Boston Market: <https://www.bostonmarket.com/catering-2/>
 - Whole Foods: <https://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/online-ordering>

With planning ahead, welcoming the changes, and taking care of yourself during these unprecedented times will create a safe and comfortable holiday season.