



## Tips for Caregivers during the Holidays

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**Adjust your expectations.** The often unrealistic expectations of the holiday season can cause a great deal of stress for anyone, especially for families touched by cancer. Try not to focus on what may be missing or what is different about this year's holiday season. Instead, focus on what the holidays are truly about—a time of sharing with others, being thankful, renewing friendships, and appreciating life.

**Take a holiday from cancer.** Your loved one may prefer to celebrate the holidays as normally as possible without dwelling on cancer. Try not to bring up the subject of cancer unless your loved one wants to talk about it. Chances are, your loved one doesn't want to be treated differently or for family members to pity them. Show your loved one you want to spend time with them because you enjoy their company.

**Just ask.** If you aren't sure how your loved one wants to celebrate the holidays this year, just ask. Don't assume they can't handle an open, honest discussion. While your loved one may want to be treated as normally as possible, they may still want to keep things simple this holiday. Communicating with your loved one can help everyone feel better.

**Include your loved one.** Your loved one likely wants to feel as independent and in control as possible. Allow your loved one to decide what they can and will do this holiday. Avoid secret phone calls and whispering behind their back. Instead, work together with your loved one to make decisions about holiday preparations and activities.

**Be a good listener.** Don't try to tell your loved one what to think, feel, or how to act. Sometimes just being there to listen, without judgment, is the best thing you can do. They might not want to talk at all, and would rather sit quietly instead. Remember, you don't always have to find solutions or fix everything. Just follow your loved one's cues and acknowledge their feelings.

**Accept your loved one's bad days.** Amidst the joyful and festive tone of the holiday season, your loved one may feel different inside. That is okay. Your loved one can't be expected to be upbeat and positive at all times. And, putting these demands on them will only cause more frustration, guilt and stress. Give your loved one space if they need it and try not to take things too personally.

**Communicate sensitively.** Since it is impossible to know what your loved one is going through right now, it is important not to act like you do. Avoid saying things like: "I know how you feel," "Stay positive," or "Don't worry, you'll be fine." Instead, you can say things that help like: "You are not alone in this, I'm here for you," or "I love you and we will get through this together."

**Be aware of side effects.** Your loved one may be dealing with side effects from cancer treatment, such as weight loss, hair loss, nausea, and fatigue. They may be worried about how others will react to seeing them. Aside from feeling self-conscious, they may worry about having the strength and energy to get through holidays. Ask your loved one if they want you to notify relatives about it ahead of time.

**Remind your loved one that you care.** Your loved one may need extra reassurance that they are still needed and loved. Find gifts that reflect who they are apart from cancer (e.g., books, art, music, or tickets to the museum, theater, sporting events, etc). Also, human touch goes a long way. Give them a hug or pat on the back. Show your loved one that you still see them as a person, not as a cancer patient.

**Discover new traditions.** Try not to put too much pressure on your family to maintain every holiday tradition. Things that seemed important before may give way to new priorities. Plan with your loved one which traditions to include and which to let go of this year. When you focus on what the holidays truly mean to you both, you may rediscover happiness in old and new ways.

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