



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

# CAREGIVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season can bring a wide range of emotions. It is a time when many families gather together to create long-lasting memories as well as a season of reflection and thoughts of the new year. For those facing a cancer diagnosis, however, things may not be so pleasant, and the traditional holiday spirit may be hard for them to share.

## TIPS FOR CAREGIVING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH CANCER DURING HOLIDAYS

The holidays symbolize a time of joyful reflection and happy gathering for many, but for those caring for someone with cancer, it can become a time of stress. How is it possible to balance the needs of family and friends, when your loved one may not be in the holiday spirit? How can you express your own concerns without being perceived as insensitive? The obligations of the holidays may also add new burdens of time and commitment.

To manage these pressures while caring for your loved one, use each letter in the word SUPPORT to remind yourself of seven key coping strategies.

**Support network.** A social support network can help address emotional and practical concerns and provide useful feedback and coping skills, including how to have honest and meaningful discussions and ways to express your feelings.

Friends and family may be able to pick up some of caregiving duties in the short term. My Cancer Circle™ ([www.mycancercircle.net](http://www.mycancercircle.net)) is an online tool where families and friends can keep track of needs, goals and other information related to the care of your loved one.

Oncology social workers can also offer support for caregivers. CancerCare's oncology social workers provide counseling and case management to individuals affected by cancer online, face-to-face or over the telephone. They can also direct you to other organizations that address the concerns of caregivers.

**Understand.** Your loved one may not be in the "holiday spirit." Seek to empathize with that person to better understand their experience and needs. This can be far more meaningful than the external trappings of the holidays. Organizations like Imerman Angels ([www.imermanangels.org](http://www.imermanangels.org)) and Cancer Hope Network ([www.cancerhopenetwork.org](http://www.cancerhopenetwork.org)) can connect you to other caregivers who understand your concerns and may be able to provide insights into what worked for them.

**Practice self-care.** The holidays are a hectic time. The pressures of decorating, buying presents and preparing special foods can make your regular caregiving duties that much more difficult. As a caregiver, you may experience feelings such as sadness, anger, resentment, frustration and even a loss of hope under all these demands. Self-care means identifying your own individual needs and taking steps to meet them. Take time for some of the activities that nurture you. These can include, but are not limited to, going for a walk, reading a book, exercising and meditation or other relaxation techniques. There is no right or wrong way in defining self-care as long as you are investing some time and energy in taking care of yourself.

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### **Prepare questions for health care providers.**

Staying informed can create a smoother transition throughout the holidays. No matter the diagnosis, stage or treatment, having good communication with the medical team can assist you throughout the process. Prior to meeting with the medical team, you and your loved one can brainstorm specific medical concerns that might impact the ability to celebrate. Your medical team may suggest ways your loved one can more fully participate in holiday activities or traditions, whether at home or in the hospital.

**Organize.** The holiday season often requires a lot of planning and preparation, as does caregiving. Whether it's organizing a holiday meal or a family gathering, it's important to try to minimize the usual holiday stressors. Allow yourself sufficient time to plan which traditions might need to be put aside this year or ask others to assist with preparations. Give yourself permission to work at your own pace and be open to the creation of new traditions for you and your loved ones.

**Respect your loved one's decisions.** During the holidays it can be especially helpful to support a loved one's decisions to celebrate or not celebrate certain aspects of the holidays. As a caregiver this can be challenging; remember that your loved one's experience is unique to them and that too many activities may be overwhelming. Try to be honest about desires and expectations in order to create lasting holiday memories filled with love and compassion.



**Try out new memories.** Life during the holidays is rarely the same when a loved one is affected by cancer, but your loved one's cancer should not discourage you from being innovative and trying new things. Including others and remaining respectful of your loved one's strengths and weaknesses can help. Focus on the present in order to broaden the perception of what is most important during the holidays: the love and support of family and friends.

### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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