



Surviving the Holidays: Finding Hope in a Season of Change

The holidays are often filled with joy. But for those facing cancer, this season can also bring sadness, stress, and a deep sense of loss. Whether you're newly diagnosed, in treatment, navigating survivorship, or caring for a loved one with cancer, the expectations and emotions of the season can feel overwhelming.

The truth is, cancer changes things. From long-standing traditions to energy levels and emotional capacity, it's okay if this holiday doesn't look or feel like they used to.

As one of our mentors so wisely shared:



"I might become upset and cry. These tears may be necessary for my healing and recovery—please don't be embarrassed by them. Pat me on my shoulder, offer a hug, and let me know you're there. Words aren't necessary."

If you're entering this season with a heavy heart, know you're not alone, and you don't have to go it alone.

Make a Plan. Give Yourself Grace.

Changes in holiday routines can bring on feelings of grief. That grief, whether for traditions that can't be observed or celebrated in the same way, physical health challenges, or lost time, is a natural part of adapting to change. A bit of preparation can go a long way.

Take time to:

- **Identify what you can do, and what you'll need to let go of.**
- **Know your emotional triggers and decide ahead of time how to respond.**
- **Communicate your needs clearly to family and friends.**

One gentle strategy is to write a letter before the holidays begin. This note can let your loved ones know how you're feeling and how they can support you. It also helps take pressure off awkward conversations in the moment, giving you the chance to set the tone and boundaries that are right for you.

You might choose to update everyone on your treatment status in the letter, or share that you'd prefer not to talk about cancer at all during celebrations. Either choice is valid. This is your story to tell.

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

Between the financial impact of treatment and the emotional weight of the season, scaling back is not just okay, it's often necessary. Let go of the pressure to do it all. If you're struggling with gift-giving or holiday tasks, ask for help. Most loved ones are eager to assist, but they may need direction. A small ask like help wrapping presents, preparing a meal, or picking up groceries can make a big difference.

Don't Forget the Caregivers

Caregivers give their all, especially during the holidays. But they often set aside their own needs, unsure how to ask for support. This season, be mindful of the physical and emotional load caregivers carry. If you're a caregiver, take time to rest, ask for help, and say "yes" when it's offered. You deserve support, too.

Hold on to Hope

The holidays may not feel "normal" but moments of love, peace, and joy are still possible. With clear communication, thoughtful planning, and a whole lot of compassion for yourself and others, you can navigate this season with hope.

Sample Pre-Holiday Letter

Dear Friends and Family,

As you know, I'm going into this holiday season with a cancer diagnosis. With treatment and everything that's going on, I'm finding it hard to muster up holiday cheer.

I won't isolate myself, but I may need to leave gatherings early. I don't feel like talking about my diagnosis much right now. If I become emotional, please don't worry. Sometimes tears are part of healing. A hug or a reassuring presence means the world.

My energy is low this season. I can't do everything I used to do, and if someone can help with a few holiday tasks, I'd appreciate it. Thank you for caring. Your love and concern are a comfort.

*With gratitude,
[Your Name]*

Need someone to talk to who's been there? We're here to help. Visit cancerhopenetwork.org to request a peer mentor.