

Fact Sheet

Coping with cancer at Christmas

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Christmas is here and making its presence felt very fast! The shops are stacked with Christmas goods and decorations are underway. Many houses have their Christmas trees up and lights on. It is called the “silly season” for good reason! It is a time of giving, joy, relaxation and indulgence!

However, getting through Christmas brings challenges as well. Managing family lunches and dinners, gift shopping, battling long waits and parking.

When you are diagnosed with cancer the entire experience changes. For many people who are facing an illness that is chronic, or involves surgery and treatment, this time of year becomes even more meaningful. If you are newly diagnosed, it is easy to think about how things seemed easier last Christmas or to wonder what will happen next Christmas. Our minds have a way of drifting into the past and the future, and to dwell on uncertainty, leaving you feeling anxious or sad.

Energy, motivation and enthusiasm are low when you are living with, or recovering from, cancer or caring for someone who is. You might struggle with your own or others' expectations or might struggle with fatigue or nausea and that Christmas meal just does not feel that special anymore!



So how do you get through it all?

No matter what stage you are at with a cancer diagnosis, newly diagnosed, recovering from surgery, or having further treatments such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy, there are particular challenges at Christmas.

Prioritise things that matter and those that don't. Maybe you have single-handedly organised big family gatherings before, but if it is too much now, delegate, and spend your energy wisely. Not being able to do things in exactly the same way as previously is not the same as 'failing' or never doing them again. Pace yourself and take a break when you need to. Online shopping for gifts or groceries may be just what you need!

Try not to put pressure on yourself about eating if your appetite is low or you feel nauseous. Perhaps you can just nibble at foods you want; maybe the family can eat away from the dining table.

Invite guests that you are comfortable with and have conversation rules. If there are difficult questions you can simply ask to talk about something else.

You may want to be prepared for the, “how are you?”

Remember, it's ok to feel how you feel and allow yourself these emotions. Know that it is normal to not embrace the “holiday spirit” when you are going through surgery or treatment, and that Christmas heightens your memories and emotions.

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Don't be afraid to reach out and allow yourself to keep Christmas as low-key as you need it to be. Make sure to do nurturing things for yourself at this time.

Save energy for the things you enjoy and care about. Maybe you want to simply spend a quiet Christmas without the big family dinner. If so, you might need to be firm with family members. If you feel unable to participate in every activity, choose those that are most important to you, and explain to others that you need to take care of your health at this time.

Managing Christmas while you are coping with your diagnosis and treatment will help to keep this time of year a special and treasured time for you.



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Call Lifeline anytime day or night on **13 11 14**

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

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