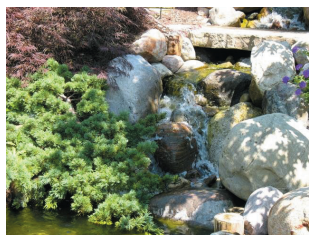


Navigating through the Holidays While on the Cancer Journey

By Kristina Austin, MSED



It's hard to believe the holidays are right around the corner. Most of us look forward to the holidays, but the hustle and bustle that often accompany this time of the year can leave us feeling stressed and less than jolly. Couple the holidays with a challenge such as cancer and families may

need advice on managing the holidays.

A cancer diagnosis can impact families emotionally, spiritually and financially. It takes a toll on the energy level of the person diagnosed and the caregivers and can often necessitate the need for a shift in family roles and responsibilities. Re-evaluating plans and expectations well in advance of the holidays can help lower everyone's stress level.

- Sit down together now and discuss what activities are most important and what can be trimmed back or eliminated? Set realistic expectations for gift giving. Share in advance with children if gift giving will be more limited and help them understand why. Perhaps the children will delight in creating their own gifts for family and friends.

- If your home is usually the gathering place for holiday dinners, ask another family member or friend to host. You are still a part of the festivities, but you don't have the added stress of being the host. Even if you decide to have the dinner at your home, ask guests to bring side dishes and desserts.

- Consider asking those that are closest to you to help clean the house and help with any decorating. Children can be a big help also and may feel more included. A family member or friend can also help to pick up gifts and make trips to the grocery store.

- Depending on where you are in your cancer journey, you may not have much of an appetite. If you're going to someone else's home for a holiday dinner, let them know your situation ahead of time so they understand why you're eating may be limited. If this makes you feel uncomfortable, have dinner at home and visit others after dinner for coffee or just to enjoy the company.

- Whether you are the person diagnosed or the caregiver/support person, you may not have the energy to do everything you did last year. Give yourself permission to cut back on decorations, cookie baking and any other traditions that may be very taxing.

- Holidays can be an emotional time and even more so with a cancer diagnosis. It's helpful to acknowledge emotions and find someone who you feel comfortable talking with. Take some time each day for "self."

When we truly stop to think about it, the real joy of the holidays is in spending time with family and friends and acknowledging those things for which we are grateful.

About the Author:

Kristina Austin, MSED, LSW, is part of the program staff at The Gathering Place. She facilitates support groups, works with individuals, and provides educational programs in the community. Kristina can be reached at 216.595.9546 or austin@touchedbycancer.org.

Upcoming programs at The Gathering Place

Cancer Transitions: Moving Beyond Treatment

Helping cancer survivors make the transition from active treatment to post-treatment care. Offered in collaboration with University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center and supported by a grant from LIVESTRONG and the Cancer Support Community.

— Wednesdays, October 12 - November 16, 6:00-8:30pm
The Gathering Place East, 23300 Commerce Park, Beachwood

— Thursdays, October 13 - November 17, 6:00-8:30pm
The Gathering Place West, 800 Sharon Drive, Westlake

Creating Cards

Create cards for the season from original prints and handmade papers.

— Thursdays, November 3, 10, 17, December 1, 1:30-3:00pm

The Gathering Place East ~ Participants need to attend first session.

Retreat for Caregivers

Learn ways to reduce stress and strategies that will help you with care giving.

— Saturday, November 5, 8:30am-3:00pm
The Gathering Place East

Craft and a Cookie

For children ages 3-6 and a parent (or grandparent/guardian).

— Thursday, December 1, 11:00am-12:00pm
The Gathering Place West

Gift of Touch

Learn hand and foot massage and Reiki to nurture yourself and loved ones.

— Monday, December 5, 6:30-8:30pm – The Gathering Place East

— Tuesday, December 6, 6:30-8:30pm – The Gathering Place West

Advance registration required for all programs by calling 216.595.9546

The Gathering Place is a cancer support center providing free programs and services to individuals and families coping with cancer. Programs include those for children and families, counseling, support groups, a lending library staffed by a full time medical librarian, nutrition, exercise classes, and programs to help manage stress. Visit www.touchedbycancer.org or call 216.595.9546 for more information. The Gathering Place has locations in Beachwood and Westlake.

