

Special Occasions and Celebrations

Information for people affected by cancer

Special occasions and celebrations can be a time of joy for many people. However, if you have cancer or are caring for someone with cancer, you and those around you may have mixed emotions about celebrating or simply not feel like celebrating at all. This is completely normal.

Side effects from treatment, such as nausea, fatigue and pain may also make the usual festivities difficult.

Katherine Lane, Nurse Manager at Cancer Council Victoria, said her team of cancer nurses regularly receive phone calls from people concerned about how they can make the most of special occasions. “Celebrations can be challenging for people affected by cancer.”

“Some people are worried that their feelings and emotions may dampen the occasion for others, or that they cannot manage the usual festivities.” For those who have lost someone to cancer, feelings of sadness and loneliness often feel stronger at this time. Speaking with a caring cancer nurse can help. “As experienced cancer nurses, we are here to listen and provide emotional and practical support to help people cope with the challenges or feelings of sadness they may be facing.”

Katherine encourages anyone who would like ideas or support in managing celebrations to call Cancer Council **13 11 20** to speak with with an experienced cancer nurse or email askanurse@cancervic.org.au. To speak with a nurse through an interpreter, call **13 14 50**.

Tips for celebrations

If you have been diagnosed with cancer or caring for someone with cancer, we hope these tips may help you make the most of special occasions.

Adjust expectations

- Discuss with your family and friends what you are able to manage and then make a plan. Make a list of things you can do and what people can do to assist such as cooking, shopping or travel to appointments. Ask for and accept offers of help.
- Talk to your treating team, they may be able to adjust your treatment timing so you can celebrate an occasion at a certain time.
- If you are not able to attend the celebration, ask someone to take a video, or use Skype or Facetime so you can still be part of the festivities.
- If gift giving is part of your celebrations, consider online shopping or gift vouchers for presents. This can save both time and energy.
- During the holiday season consider ‘Kris Kringle’, this can help save time and money.

Be gentle with yourself

- Give yourself permission to celebrate the best way you can. Try to accept any changes and be kind to yourself and your family.
- Have an exit plan prepared for times when you may find a gathering or party overwhelming. Ask a friend to be your support if you want to leave or need a break.
- It is normal to experience a range of emotions from sadness to happiness; do not feel guilty about this.
- Put your own needs high on the priority list. Remember you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, especially if you’re not feeling up to it.
- If you are not very good at saying no, ask a friend to do it for you.

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Keep it simple

- Consider not hosting celebrations especially if you have treatment planned during this time. Ask another family member or friend to be the host, book a restaurant or arrange a picnic instead.
- If you are preparing food, keep it simple or if others are, let them know of any dietary needs. People want their guests to enjoy the celebrations and will be happy to provide meals you can enjoy.
- Allow for rest times during festivities and let people know that you may need to rest.

Seek support

- Talking to someone about your feelings can reduce feelings of sadness and isolation. Family and friends can be a good source of support.

Useful resources

Cancer Council Victoria has a range of resources you may find useful:

- *Caring for Someone with Cancer*
- *Emotions and Cancer*
- *Learning to Relax*
- *Living with Advanced Cancer*
- *Meditation CD*
- *Relaxation CD*
- *Understanding Grief.*

Call **13 11 20** or visit cancervic.org.au/resources to order or download a free copy.

- Our understanding and experienced cancer nurses are here to support you; simply call **13 11 20**. They can assist you with your concerns and feelings as well as put you in touch with support services. We also recommend that you carry out of hours contacts for your treating doctor and hospital.
- Online support including blogs and forums is available 24 hours a day via cancerconnections.com.au. It is professionally moderated by Cancer Council.
- Phone and online support services are there to support you and your family:

- **Lifeline** provides crises phone support and suicide prevention services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 13 11 14.
- **Kids Helpline** provides phone and online counselling services for young people aged 5 to 25, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Visit kidshelpline.com.au or call 1800 55 1800.
- **Griefline** provides a telephone and online counselling service; operates 12pm–3am. Visit griefline.org.au or call 1300 845 745.

To speak with an experienced and caring cancer nurse call **13 11 20** or email askanurse@cancervic.org.au. To speak with a nurse through an interpreter, call **13 14 50**.

Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This fact sheet is intended as a general introduction and is not a substitute for professional medical, legal or financial advice. Information about cancer is constantly being updated and revised by the medical and research communities. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this fact sheet.



For information and support, call a cancer nurse on **13 11 20**
 In your own language call **13 14 50**
 Email askanurse@cancervic.org.au
 Visit www.cancervic.org.au