

# 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 at this time. 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.

“This time of year 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 the demands of the holiday season to contact Cancer Council. Call **13 11 20** to speak with a cancer health professional.

### Tips for managing festivities

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 feel as well as possible at certain times.
- If you are not able to attend a 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 traditions, consider online shopping or gift vouchers for presents. This can save both time and energy.
- During the holiday season consider individual gift giving ideas such as ‘Kris Kringle’, this can help save time and money.



### Cancer information and support 13 11 20 Holiday season hours

Monday 25 December	Closed
Tuesday 26 December	Closed
Wednesday 27 December	10am – 6pm
Thursday 28 December	10am – 6pm
Friday 29 December	10am – 6pm
Monday 1 January	Closed

Our voicemail service will operate on the days we are closed. Callers can leave their name and phone number and a nurse will return the call on the next working day. To speak with a cancer nurse in your own language call 13 14 50.

#### Other support services available

<b>Lifeline</b>	13 11 14 (24 hour service)
<b>Grief Line</b>	9935 7400 (12pm – 3am)
<b>Online support</b>	cancercouncil.com.au/OC
<b>Carers Victoria</b>	1800 242 636
<b>Your local GP</b>	

## Special Occasions and Celebrations

### 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- If you are not very good at saying no, ask a friend to do it for you.

### Celebrate in new ways

- Celebrations may take on a new or different meaning, so talk with your family and friends and let them know what you would like to do.
- If your usual rituals or traditions are no longer possible or do not feel right, consider replacing them with new ones. For example, a festive breakfast may be better when energy levels are highest. If you have lost a loved one, find a way to celebrate their memory at this time.
- Enjoy special moments. You may be sad that special occasions may not be the way they used to be, but try to find joy instead in new traditions that are being established.
- If you are having treatment and do not expect to be better until after the special occasion, consider options such as Christmas in July or combining birthdays to celebrate them on the same day.

### Keep it simple

- Consider not hosting gatherings 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 themselves 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.
- Our understanding and experienced cancer health professionals 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 [www.cancerconnections.com.au](http://www.cancerconnections.com.au). It is professionally moderated by Cancer Council.
- Community centres or churches sometimes hold services for those affected by illness. Contact your church or local community centre for more information.

#### 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**  
Visit [www.cancervic.org.au](http://www.cancervic.org.au)