

New Connections

HELPING YOU FIND YOUR WAY AFTER TREATMENT



Issue 19

How much alone time

**is too much
alone time?**



Anxiety, fear of recurrence, sadness. These are all emotions that people may feel once they have finished treatment for cancer. They are all completely normal feelings. And most people need some quiet time alone to feel their feelings and then sort the feelings out. After all, figuring out how being a cancer survivor fits into your life can be challenging. All of this is normal and healthy.

Caution, however, should be exercised. Sometimes, in the name of needing to be alone for a while, people can slip into a kind of easy solitude that at first may feel safe and peaceful. Soon, however, this can turn into feelings of isolation, and eventually into depression. That's why it's important to recognize the difference between a genuine need to ponder and an excuse for not resuming life.

A vicious cycle

When people opt to be alone, it sends a message to friends and family who will usually defer to your desire and stay away. That can lead to your not only *feeling* isolated, but actually *being* isolated. This in turn can make you feel like nobody really cares about you. And that can make you withdraw and isolate yourself even more. It can be a vicious cycle that must be broken.

You may be the one who has to break the cycle

Friends and family will usually take their cue from you. And though it may not seem entirely fair, it might be you who must now take the first step. A simple invitation will be all that most people need to resume their relationship with you and to offer to help in whatever way they can.

Other people may not respond quite so readily – sometimes because they don't know what to say, sometimes because they don't fully understand what you've been through and assume that if you're finished with treatment, you should be happy and back to normal. The reluctance of some people to respond normally to you may be hurtful at first, but remind yourself that they are probably doing their best. Ironically, opening up to them about your feelings and your cancer experience may actually help them come around. And it most certainly will help you to talk.

Expand your social interactions

Generally speaking, humans are social creatures. The camaraderie of friends and even acquaintances anchors us and makes us feel complete. It reminds us we're not alone and that we're not the only people to struggle with illness. On any given day, your inclination may be to crawl back into your shell. But giving in to such inclinations may not only keep you from new and exciting experiences, it can be injurious to your long-term physical and emotional health, as well.

Survivors who have joined with others in activities such as dance or yoga classes or even simple walking clubs are in near-universal agreement about their value. Such group activities give people a greater sense of well-being and accomplishment. They impart a sense of belonging. And they take one's mind off the cancer.

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