

# Find Your Joy

## New Year, New Mindset

### *3 Ways to Emotionally Reset*

Written By: *Mirchelle Louis,*

*CEO, Cancer Support Community North Texas, MSSW/LCSW*

Photography By: *Matthew Osborne*

Ring in the New Year can be exciting. If you're a cancer patient, however, it may bring on an entirely different set of emotions. New Year's resolutions aren't quite as uplifting if you're not certain what your future holds or if you aren't sure you'll be healthy enough to run that marathon you've set your sights on running. Similarly, if the holidays with friends and family taxed you both emotionally and physically, you may be lacking that typical, start-of-the-year "get up and go" you once had.

And...that's all ok. You're not the same as you were.

The good news: While we can't control our futures, what we can control is our mindset, our boundaries with family and friends, and our emotional health heading into the New Year. The key is being realistic and measured with a healthy dose of optimism and grace, knowing life is certainly going to throw you the unexpected.

So, what are the ways we can retake control and shift our mindset from one of setting and achieving "concrete" resolutions to one of simple, little wins?

First, instead of focusing on the imposing entirety of 2024, focus on January. What can you look forward to and what small thing might you accomplish in January that will fill you with pride? Perhaps it's a paint-by-number, a visit from an out-of-town friend, or just walking around the block twice a week. Or maybe it's binge-watching an entire season of *Gilmore Girls*. Success here is recognizing the small wins that add up across a day or a month. And if you really want to feel the shine, create a sticker chart that you fill with stars as you take on and achieve little things throughout January – and each month!

Second, acknowledge the "what ifs" that you need to process, and let the "what ifs" that you can't process, go. What if I can't get to my son's graduation? What if I can't drive myself to my appointments? What if I can't take care of my aging parents? For cancer patients, what ifs can consume us if we're not careful. So instead of ignoring the elephants in the room, process and acknowledge those fears, like the fear that "I may not be around for next Christmas." Stuffing those feelings down will result in anxiety and dampen the high spots in the New Year...and it won't prevent what happens next. The reality is that there's a ton of good, positive stuff to grab onto now, so take your what ifs head on then enjoy the present.

Third, and most importantly, find the joy in each day. The stress of the holidays and New Year is easy to get caught up in, unless we're intentional about not letting it. Layer onto that the ever-present uncertainty around a cancer diagnosis – the chance of recurrence, the next scan, side effects, the impact on your job and family. While you can't affect much of the stress and uncertainty, you can make the choice to be present today. Go to kids' and grandkids' events, eat the ice cream, buy the fancy purse. Savor bite-sized pieces of life.

Finding joy also includes setting healthy boundaries with family and friends. The holidays are notorious for pushing us to our emotional limits. Perhaps this year, begin with the firm boundary that you'll only spend time with people who bring you joy and positivity. Or you commit to focusing on your emotional health over everything else – that self-care is your priority.

The bottom line is that when you get a cancer diagnosis, everything's up for grabs. You simply don't know with certainty if you'll be here for the next holiday, the next milestone or what will happen next. So, this New Year, rather than setting ambitious goals that are unrealistic, consider a shift in mindset that focuses on small, important steps and little wins. In my view, the New Year is the opportune time to emotionally reset and focus on what's right in front of you. **B**

