

# NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS: WEIGHT ISSUES AND HISTIOCYTOSIS

By Melissa, M. Thompson, MSW, LCSW

## WHAT'S HAPPENING, WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

It's January. The celebrations of the holiday season are behind us. When attending those New Year's celebrations, or while on the phone with a good friend, you heard all about those resolutions your friends and loved ones have to make better versions of themselves in the new year. Some have joined the gym, others have started to diet, some have quit smoking and some have undertaken it all.

You look in the mirror and notice how much weight you have gained since your child's treatment started months ago, and find yourself envying those who can make weight loss resolutions. Or, maybe your weight issues are caused by the inability to keep weight on during while your child is in treatment. Either way, you'd like to find a way to have better control of your weight. Here is the big question: Can you make the resolution to make a better version of yourself while your child is going through treatment for histiocytosis?

Yes, you can.

First let's make one strong point before going forward:

**Do not make changes to your diet or exercise routine without first discussing them in detail with your doctor.**

This is not the time to count calories or to take on the fad diets others around you may be working with. The food you eat and the activity you undertake can make a difference in your personal effectiveness and the support you can provide while your child is in treatment. Time is at a premium when your child is under a chemotherapy treatment regime. Discuss any changes you are considering with your medical team. They can help you take care of yourself and any underlying medical issues that may be contributing to the weight issues you may be facing.

If you decide you are going to make changes in the foods you eat or the activity level you undertake, keep in mind that your goal is to make some lifestyle changes that will be with you after your child's treatment is behind you. Small steps will go a long way to making you feel better physically and emotionally.

Here are some common weight issues faced by parents and family members of histiocytosis survivors, along with some suggestions for coping with them:

## WEIGHT LOSS

- ***This happens most often at the beginning stage of your child's treatment.***

The news that your child has a life threatening illness can put many folks appetites on hold. This is an emotional reaction to the chaos of being thrown into this new and scary world of oncology. It will typically pass as you find your bearings and gain an understanding of your child's treatment plan.

- ***Time***

While trying to understand and manage your child's treatment, you find you have little time to eat. You are answering emails and phone calls from well meaning friends and family members. You may be coping with your child's treatment side effects, which may keep you up at night and low on energy. You look at the clock and it is dinnertime and you realize you have done nothing but cook for your hungry child all day and have not eaten a bit yourself.

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- ***Emotions impact appetite during treatment***

Emotions impact appetite. Many of my clients have told me that coping with the emotional impact of their child's histiocytosis diagnosis has been much more challenging than they ever expected. Loss of appetite can come from the emotional impact of this diagnosis. Some parents experience physical reactions to the diagnosis such as upset stomach, diarrhea and tension headaches. Working with a counselor who has specific training in oncology can help you process these emotions and find your equilibrium again.

- ***What you can do***

First, discuss your weight loss issues with your medical team. It is important to rule out any underlying medical condition you may be experiencing. They can be part of your support team while your child is undergoing treatment. Often times they are the ones who remind you that you need to care for yourself as well as your child and family during this time.

In addition, you may want to consider:

- Eating when it is time to eat, not based on when you feel hungry
- 5 to 6 smaller meals instead of your typical 3 meals a day
- Adding foods high in protein such as peanut butter, nuts, protein shakes and bars
- Accepting help from friends and family – especially if the help is around meal preparation or ways for you to get some rest and take care of yourself
- Joining a support group at your hospital for parents of children being treated in oncology

## WEIGHT GAIN

- ***This is often a surprising side effect for parents while their child is in treatment***

The medical team has prepared you for the weight gain that your child's treatment may cause them – but not you. The causes of weight gain during your child's treatment stems from a variety of factors. These include little time to prepare and cook healthy meals, change in your routine so exercising seems selfish and out of the question, eating on the go, and increased appetite, along with low energy, which leads to lower activity levels.

- ***Emotional eating***

As stated earlier, emotions impact appetite. Feeling out of control, seeing your child ill from the side effects of treatment, and being tired, anxious or depressed can cause one to eat for comfort. Finding effective support for these issues is important to your long-term health strategy. Think of yourself as a resource to your child and family. You have to do what you can to nurture that resource so it can provide what it needs to at this time. Self-care is the way to do just that. Protect and preserve that resource!

- ***What you can do***

First, discuss your weight gain issues with your medical team. It is important to rule out any underlying medical condition you may be experiencing. They can be part of your support team while your child is undergoing treatment. In addition, you may want to consider:

- Eating 5 portions of fruits and vegetables a day
- Focus on eating high fiber foods
- Use caution when eating foods high in fat or high in salt
- Try to pack healthy foods in the bag you take to and from to the hospital

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- If your child is hospitalized ask friends or family members to bring something healthy to the hospital for you to eat
- Find some social support – find someone to be active with
- Exercise regularly despite being tired – find ways to walk and do other physical activities you enjoy

### **SUPPORT**

Whether you are concerned about weight loss or gain during your child's treatment, support is available. Attending support groups for parents, accepting help from those who offer it, and working with a counselor trained in oncology can help you work through your struggles fighting histiocytosis with your child.

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