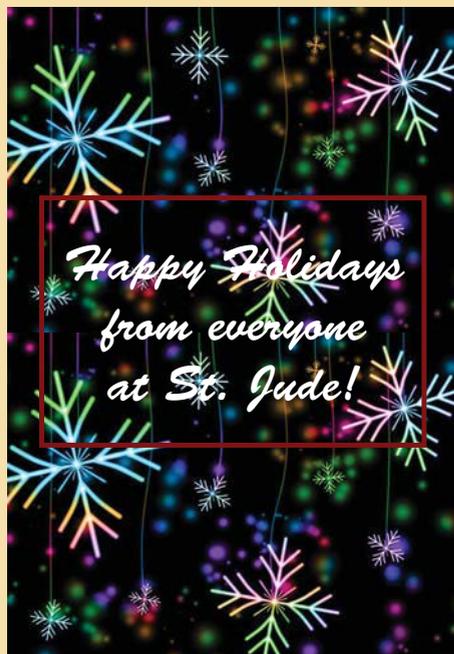


# LIFELine

St. Jude for Life



Holidays 2016



St. Jude LIFE Study  
Toll-Free Number:  
1-800-775-2167

St. Jude  
**LIFE**  
St. Jude for Life



Dear St. Jude Alumni,

The holidays are here. For most of us that means we'll be getting together with friends and family to eat, drink, make merry, and take part in longstanding traditions.

But we all know that, for many people, the holidays can be stressful. And, they can be a time when we put aside the positive health behaviors we usually practice. It's especially important for childhood cancer survivors to take good care of their health during the holidays, as much as every other day. Finding the balance can be a challenge!



For this issue of the LIFELine we asked some of the study participants and study team members in the St. Jude LIFE study to share details of their family traditions, and their tips for staying healthy and coping with holiday stress. We hope you enjoy reading about them.

And, whatever holidays you celebrate, we hope they are healthy and happy.

To your health!

Melissa M. Hudson, MD  
*Principal Investigator, St. Jude Lifetime Cohort Study*

**Has it been a few years** since your last LIFE study evaluation? If so, you may be receiving an email from us inviting you to return for a follow-up visit. The email will contain a link to a web page where you'll have the opportunity to enter your preferred days for coming to St. Jude for the 2-3 day visit, and the best method (phone, text, or email) for a study visit coordinator to reach you to finalize your appointment. You'll also be asked a few questions about your interest in participating in additional research.

If you're not sure if you've shared your email address with us and you want to be contacted in this way, you can update your contact info at the following site:

<https://hospital.stjude.org/apps/forms/fb/stjude-life-contact-update/>

# St. Jude LIFE Study people celebrate with health in mind

## Sarah: Avoid holiday weight gain by not skipping meals!



*The Terrell family enjoying the outdoors*

Sarah Terrell is a dietician who is in charge of research studies focused on diet and exercise that are related to the LIFE study.

Sarah lives in a suburb of Memphis with her husband, 11 year old daughter, and 13 year old son. “We have pumpkin pie at both Thanksgiving and Christmas— it’s that important!” she says. Her family puts up the Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving and they usually watch the movie “A Christmas Story” at some point during the holidays.

Sarah’s advice for coping with holiday stress emphasizes meals management. “Plan ahead and cook ahead,” she advises. “Most importantly, don’t skip meals. Even though holiday meals are often served at times that are different from the everyday schedule,

have something to eat as close to your regular meal times as possible.” She notes that “Not skipping meals can actually help you avoid holiday weight gain.” Sarah’s final bit of advice: “Try to focus on the reason for the season and don’t let food become the focus.”

## Jeremy: Don't neglect your sleep!

Jeremy Crowe is an exercise physiologist at St. Jude who perform exercise testing on survivors for late effects of cancer and treatment.

“The holidays for me are pretty low key, as we have a small family,” Jeremy says. “My wife, my eight year old daughter, and I spend both Thanksgiving and Christmas with my mom and my in-laws. Every Thanksgiving my wife makes peach cobbler. At Christmas we like to watch old movies with a holiday theme. Everything from ‘The Bells of St. Mary’s’ to ‘A Christmas Story,’” he says.

“I make sure to keep up my exercise program and I really try to eat as clean as I can leading up to the holidays,” says Jeremy. “I also try to maintain a good sleep pattern. Sleep will dictate a lot when health is a concern and I pay close attention to my sleeping habits during this time.”



*Jeremy Crowe with his daughter and their dog*

## Koko: Exercise to energize and cope with stress



*Koko (left) with her mom, sisters, and niece*

Komal Kochar (Koko) is a Clinical Research Associate who manages the coding for the Department of Epidemiology at St. Jude, helping to turn study participants' survey responses into data that can be analyzed.

In addition to Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day, Koko celebrates two Hindu holidays at this time of year. “We celebrate Diwali in October or November,” she says. “The date is determined by the position of the moon. Diwali is a festival of lights that celebrates goodness over evil and hope

over despair,” Koko explains. “We light candles and lamps everywhere around the house, participate in prayers, have an elaborate dinner, and exchange gifts between family and friends.”

Koko and her family also celebrate Lohri, which commemorates the passing of the winter solstice and takes place on January 13. “At Lohri we honor and welcome all the newly wed couples and newborns in the community,” she says.

Koko relies on exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to cope with holiday stress. “I wear a fitness tracker,” she says, “and my goal is to log at least 12,000 steps every day. I used to squeeze in exercise if and when I could, but now I put it first. I have more energy and everything seems to work better that way!”



*Andrew Nixon with his wife*

### **Andrew: Take time to appreciate life**

Twenty-eight year old Andrew Nixon was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma when he was 16. Originally from Alabama, he now lives near Raleigh, North Carolina, and is the pastor of two small country churches. Andrew has been married for three years—no kids yet. He and his wife, Hannah, get together with Hannah’s family at Thanksgiving and travel to Alabama to be with Andrew’s mom at Christmas. “My wife and I are trying to start our own traditions but we do keep a tradition that my father started of watching ‘A Christmas Carol’—an old movie from the 50s—every year on Christmas Eve. My father passed away four years ago and I still miss him very much. It’s important for us to carry on a tradition that he started.”

How does Andrew cope with the stress of the holidays? “I think about health a lot,” he says. “I exercise at least five days a week and I really try to eat healthy and not overeat. When my mother is cooking, though, “I make some exceptions to my rules, and I know I’m going to eat a lot!” Andrew relies on his faith to cope with holiday stress. “Stress takes a lot out of you physically as well as emotionally. As part of my faith tradition (Seventh-day Adventist) we take resting on the Sabbath very seriously. I think it’s important for everyone to make sure they get regular times of rest, and to stop and appreciate life without necessarily having to be busy all the time.”

### **Shauna: Focus on people and relationships**

Shauna Torretta lives with her husband and her mother in a small town near Bellingham, Washington. The 42-year old was treated for Wilms tumor (a tumor of the kidney) when she was just 3 years old. Shauna was raised in Texas and moved to Washington as a young adult. “We usually celebrate Thanksgiving with around 20 people and always invite someone who may not have a place to go,” she says. The most important tradition for Shauna and her family is the sharing of gratitude just before the Thanksgiving meal. “We hold hands and take turns sharing what we are thankful for, which most often includes family, health and God’s grace,” she says.

Shauna and her husband care for her mother, who had a stroke three years ago and is also living with COPD and emphysema. “We brought her from Alabama to live with us and it’s been three great years,” she says. Shauna copes with Christmas holiday stress by sharing the load with her husband and participating in events at her church. “My husband is a teacher so he has time off during the holidays. We do all the Christmas shopping together—in fact, we do everything together,” she says. “We don’t spend a lot on gifts or entertaining. We just try to have fun together and keep a light-hearted attitude. Over the years, we have learned to not let the little things like pet hair or the dirty dishes bother us too much. It’s a part of life and we hope to enjoy every moment with the people and relationships in our life, not the things...as that is what life is really all about.”



*Shauna Torretta and her sister-in-law volunteering at a fundraiser for a local children's hospital, near Olympia, WA*

### **Pia: Don't try to do everything!**

Dr. Pia Banerjee is a clinical research neuropsychologist who supervises the staff who perform the LIFE study neuro-cognitive assessments. Pia and her husband travel to Phoenix, Arizona, for the holidays. “At Christmas, my siblings

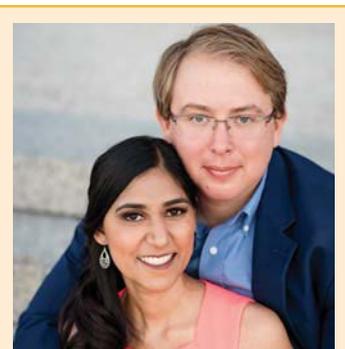
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and I like to continue our favorite traditions from childhood,” she says. “My younger brother still puts out cookies and milk for Santa Claus!”

Pia recommends a four-point program for coping with holiday stress:

1. Set priorities, and don't try to do everything. Ask yourself, “What are my three most important traditions?” and focus on them.
2. Stick to a budget! Finances are one of the biggest sources of stress in families, especially during the holidays. Homemade gifts or gifts of time can be more meaningful than an expensive present.
3. Go outside. Outdoor activities are great stress relievers. Go sledding or caroling, visit a tree farm, or involve the whole family in a walk after a holiday dinner.
4. Take time for yourself. Do what you know works for you to relieve stress: go for a run, take a long bath, read, or do whatever activity you find most relaxing.



*Dr. Pia Banerjee with her husband*

## **Cara: Emphasize family time**



*Dr. Cara Kimberg with her husband and son*

Dr. Cara Kimberg, who grew up in Westchester, New York, worked for several years as a clinical research psychologist at St. Jude. She now uses her experience with the LIFE Study as a primary care psychologist in private pediatric practice. At this time of year, Cara and her family celebrate Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and New Year's Day. (This year Hanukkah runs from December 24 through January 1, 2017.) “When I was a child we lit the menorah candle for each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, and we each opened a small gift on each night,” she recalls. “We always got together with family and friends sometime during the holidays.”

One of Cara's favorite holiday memories is the New Year's Eve tradition of sleepovers at her grandparents' house. “My husband and I are continuing that tradition with our son, who's 16 month old,” she says. “He'll be sleeping at Grandma's house with his cousin this year.” She plans to continue her family's Hanukkah traditions and create new ones with her son as he grows up. “We'll be lighting the candles and reading to him about the meaning of the holiday,” she says. Cara copes with holiday stress by keeping in mind the underlying purpose of holiday traditions. “The gifts and food are secondary,” she says. “Spending time with family is what makes the holidays meaningful.”

## **Dane: Stay self-aware**



*Dane Perdieu with his wife*

Dane Perdieu, of Ashmore, Illinois, was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, a type of bone cancer, when he was 14 years old. Dane's tumor recurred 40 years later and he underwent a year of high-dose chemotherapy and had a portion of his lung removed.

Dane has been back to St. Jude four times for the LIFE study evaluation, and he returned again this December to run in the 10K race during the St. Jude marathon weekend. “Sports and physical fitness have always been a big part of my life,” he says.

Dane has been married for 32 years. The couple have one adult daughter. During the holidays they participate in a big family gathering with relatives who live nearby. “We have two turkeys, one deep-fried and one smoked, because it's a big group,” he says. Dane has several strategies for coping with stress during the holidays. “I follow a 12-step program for substance abuse recovery and the support system is great. I spend some time every morning praying and meditating and I do a self-assessment at the end of the day to see how well I've stayed on track,” he says.