Killing Boredom While Killing Cancer

Chemotherapy for testicular cancer is hard, but also very boring.

December 12, 2016 By Justin Birckbichler

For my chemotherapy regimen, I have 5 treatments in week one of the cycle, followed by two weeks of one treatment in each week. I had my one day of treatment this past Monday, and it was only about an hour total. Essentially, this means most of week two and three is spent recovering and regaining my strength so it can be torn back down when the next cycle begins.

While not being injected with chemo drugs every day is a much preferred way to spend my time, this can lead to a lot of downtime and boredom. Luckily, I'm not quite at the point in my treatment where my immune system is fully compromised yet, so I am feeling mostly back to normal. However, I did want to be proactive and not get sick or overly fatigued, so much of my time was spent in my house. While this was the smartest plan, being stuck in your house all week definitely can lead to some extreme boredom.

As I've mentioned, we moved to a new house over the summer, which was a huge blessing. Our current bedroom is probably bigger than our whole upstairs at our old apartment and about the size of one of my first apartments. Being cramped into a small apartment would have driven me nuts.

Despite my larger space, I was still in need of activities to kill the boredom.

I spent most of my time watching TV or playing video games to be honest. As a teacher, I would love to say that I used my time to catch up on my reading (both personal and professional), but I would be lying. One of the smaller side effects I am experiencing due to chemo is recurring headaches and a general "fuzziness" in my brain. It makes it hard to read a novel and keep everything clear. I tried reading, but it was frustrating, so I decided to just hold off until I felt I could handle it.

With books were out of the question for the time being, another favorite way to pass the time was a prime choice. December is a good month to have all of this time off because it's my annual 25 days of Christmas movie marathon. I don't care for the selection provided by Freeform (formerly ABC Family), so I've developed my own, which includes the classics like Rudolph and Home Alone along with more obscure choices such as Iron Man 3. (I swear it's a Christmas movie.) In past years, I've struggled to do all 25 movies since a full-time job doesn't lend itself to watching a 90+ minute movie every night, but this year, I've been able to keep up so far. Always need to look for the good in the bad.

On top of watching movies, I've been writing with my kids on Google Classroom every day. I love what I do and it is really hard to be away from the classroom for so long. I'm hoping to go and visit before my white blood cells drop (because we all know kids are walking germ factories) and my hair totally falls out, but writing to them is a good substitute. Many of my quietest kids are writing much more than they verbally share, so it's cool to see how they best express themselves. In true teacher fashion, I'm also giving them writing feedback along the way.

Other activities to quell the boredom have included building a puzzle with my mom and putting together a LEGO set, both of which are Avengers-themed. While these seem like things better suited for my students, I am essentially an overgrown child. They also have the benefit of keeping my mind somewhat sharp. The puzzle was one of those ones that have reflective foil on it. As soon as we were done, I had to cover it up because the reflection was hurting my eyes. I guess I'm still sensitive to light!

My independence also returned this week, as did my total mobility.

My scar from my surgery finally appears to be fully healed and doesn't bother me when I bend over anymore. The "You're Not Allowed to Lift Things More Than 10 Pounds" restriction from my port installation was also lifted, so I could move things around. This meant that I could finally do more than uselessly lie in bed.

One day, I straightened up the house (an activity I generally hate, but felt good to have some order over the chaos that has become my life). I decided I wanted to make pizza dough another day, because it's one of my favorite things to make and generally low odor. This endeavor was successful and it was pretty cool to serve my mom and Mallory instead of the other way around.

I also had enough energy to design and create Mallory's and my ugly Christmas sweaters this week. I'm not going to share any pictures now (as this is an annual tradition that I treat with utmost secrecy until the time is right), but it was fun to spend some time with her watching Christmas movies and work together on them. Stay tuned for the final reveals.

I wanted to leave the house a few times, so I called Nurse Jenn to ensure that this would be ok. She confirmed that my blood cell counts were fine for the time being, so I could go out if I felt well and had no fever. My mom and I went out to run errands a few days, and it was good to get out of the house. We dropped leaves off at the dump, took her van in for an oil change, and went grocery shopping (smells here were a little overwhelming) and out to lunch (whereas my burger was a little underwhelming). Friends came to visit over the weekend and ordered pizza, which is a close second to Chick-Fil-A for favorite chemo food.

Overall, I felt great this whole week — very few chemotherapy side effects.

I had no nausea and wasn't very tired, and I eventually got back into sleeping through the night (even without the aid of Ambien). It felt kind of wrong not working if I didn't feel sick, but I know internally there was a battle going on and pushing it would make things worse. My mom left on Saturday morning and Mal would be working through the week (aside from taking me to my treatment on Monday afternoon). This means I will be left by myself all week, a prospect that

excites me and also makes me a bit anxious. I guess it’s appropriate that the Christmas movie for today was Home Alone!

I’m currently undergoing chemotherapy to cure my cancer. Each Monday, I’ll post my thoughts on this experience. These may be reflections on my prior week’s treatments, musings about my newly-altered life, or anything else that comes into my “chemo brain.” Follow along with my journey each week.

This post originally appeared on A Ballsy Sense of Tumor. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/killing-boredom-killing-cancer