How to Make Christmas Shopping With RA Easier

by ANNA SCANLON

How to Get Through Christmas Shopping With RA

‘Tis the season for Christmas shopping for everyone you know. And while this can be a great way to hang out with friends and family as you casually browse for Christmas gifts and sip gingerbread lattes, it can also end up being stressful and exhausting. Here are a few tips to help you survive the holiday shopping experience when you’re a rheumatoid arthritis (RA) sufferer.

Plan Ahead

Plan ahead for long bouts of Christmas shopping. Of course, short visits to the mall here and there can happen whenever you like, but if you’re going to make a day of it with someone special, plan in advance.

This can mean taking painkillers or any of your medication that can help ease the pain a couple of hours before you go out so you’ll be at your best. You may even want to take something with you like an icy hot pack you can apply on your joints as needed, but dispose of when you are finished. Be sure to bring any medication you might need so that you can take it if and when it is necessary.

Make a List and Check It Twice

Before you go out on your shopping excursion, make a list of everything you wish to buy for everyone, noting a few alternatives if necessary. This will help cut down on the stress and running around the mall looking for something you aren’t sure of. Instead, you’ll be able to fairly easily check your list and plan a mode of action without going all over the place without direction.

Stay Hydrated

Bring a bottle of water to refill at a water fountain or buy water when you’re shopping. This will keep you in tiptop condition and ready to keep shopping without feeling dizzy or faint.

Staying hydrated will also keep your circulatory system going and can actually decrease pain. This is especially important if you are somewhere with lots of indoor heating, which can make you feel weaker or dehydrated a lot quicker.

Dress for the Weather

If you’re going to an outdoor shopping center, be sure to dress appropriately. Because RA can affect circulation, especially if you are in a cold climate, you’ll need to wear a hat, gloves and extra socks to keep your head and extremities warm.

With RA, being cold is not just uncomfortable; if you have Raynaud's, it can be downright painful. Dressing warmly is really about keeping your system regulated and keeping your body on track.

Rest

This may seem like a no-brainer, but if you're on a high from Christmas shopping, you may not want to sit down and rest. However, it is important you do so to give your joints a bit of a break. Instead of running around non-stop, try and make it a goal to sit down once every hour or hour and a half to ensure things go much more smoothly.

Use a Mobility Device

If your RA is particularly bad, don't be afraid to bring your mobility device out with you. This can save your energy and keep you going for a lot longer than if you pushed it.

If you don't have a mobility device, many grocery stores and larger chain stores will provide one for you, either free of charge or for a very nominal rental fee. Larger malls will often provide mobility scooters in their customer service center as well, making it much easier for you to get around. And as a bonus, you can carry everyone else's things in the basket!

Plan for a Meal Out

Planning to have a meal out halfway through your shopping excursion can be a great way to ensure everyone stops and pauses for good 45 minutes to an hour. This will give you time to refresh, refuel and take any medications without feeling like you're weighing everyone down. If everyone stops to eat, you can all regroup together.

During your shopping, try to avoid eating anything with a high sugar content, which can give you more energy temporarily, but may make you feel worse in the long run. Instead, try eating something healthy and fresh like a salad, vegetables, or some carbohydrate options. This will refuel you, but in a healthy way that won't cause you to crash and burn later on.

Don't Do It All at Once

If you find one outing isn't enough for you to get everything done because it is simply too much for you, don't despair. It is totally okay to have to plan to Christmas shop a couple of times.

If you have to bow out early, don't beat yourself up about it, but have a back-up plan for getting home in case your shopping buddies want to stay out longer than you do. This way, you won't feel guilty and you can avoid a potential conflict later down the line if people have trouble understanding your RA.

Become a Savvy Online Shopper

If you're having a flare or didn't find time to get everything you need in person, why not exercise your fingers and credit card instead? Online shopping may not bring about the Christmas spirit as much as shopping somewhere in person where the halls are sufficiently decked, but it does mean you can get everything you need without causing yourself too much grief or damage.

Plus, with online shopping, you can much more readily comparison shop, making it easier to figure out where you're getting the best deals. If you have to do that this year, get into the festive Christmas spirit by putting on some holiday music and sipping hot cocoa as you shop.

Wrapping It Up

Instead of trying to wrap up all of your gifts by hand, and potentially hurting yourself, try using gift bags instead this year. It’s a quick and easy way to get all your gifts looking gorgeous without all of the fuss!