9 Tips for Getting Through the Holidays With Rheumatoid Arthritis

by LANA BARHUM

Enjoying the Holidays With RA

The holidays with RA can be rough on people. It is hard to get into the holiday spirit when you are worrying about RA flares.

What is worse is the holidays coincide with the coldest time of the year, especially for those of us in the northern hemisphere. While the colder weather does not cause arthritis, it can still increase your joint pain, according to the Arthritis Foundation.

It might seem tempting to skip the celebrations or stay in bed for the most of December, but you know neither is possible. To prevent the holidays from stressing you out and causing flares, take some simple measures to make the holiday with RA easier.

9 Holiday Tips for People With Rheumatoid Arthritis

1. Start Early

The retailers start early, and so should you. It is never too early to start your holiday shopping, meal planning, sending out cards and decorating. This way you can pace yourself and stress less as you get closer to December 24.

2. Downsize and Simplify

Christmas day will suck if you are lying in bed due to a flare because you overdid things. Now is a good time to rethink holiday plans and traditions, and to remember the holidays are about spending time with loved ones – not the gifts, parties, decorations or desserts.

It is okay to allow others to take over family traditions. You do not have to do everything the way it is always been done.

You do not need to put up more than one tree, decorate your entire living room and the outside of your home does not need to resemble a miniature North Pole.

3. Be Realistic

If a flare-up is what you are looking for, overscheduling yourself is the answer. However, I am sure you are not, and the best way to avoid this is to schedule one major activity (i.e., decorating) every few days or break the activity down over a few days.

No one knows better than you what you are capable of and what your limitations are. Do what you can within your

abilities, do not throw yourself into everything at once and be diligent in your planning and scheduling.

4. Learn to Delegate and Say 'No'

If you are not the best at delegating tasks, the holidays are a good time to learn to become comfortable. Delegate everything you can.

Your spouse or teenager can run errands. Even younger kids can help with cleaning, preparing and decorating.

Whatever you can ask others to do, do it, and ask for help as much as you can. While you are at it, learn to set boundaries. You cannot attend every holiday party or help at every volunteer event.

Do only what is important and makes you happy. You are entitled to enjoy the holidays, stay in good emotional and physical health, and not feel exhausted and overburdened with responsibilities.

5. Simplify the Gift Giving

Save yourself from the time, crowds and being on your feet for hours by doing your gift buying online. Some websites even offer gift wrapping and ship directly to the recipient — both are great timesavers for you.

As for the presents you will be given in person, forget the wrapping paper and use gift bags instead. Pick gift bags up from your local Dollar Store and save yourself from achy hands you would otherwise get from cutting and taping.

Lastly, forget the homemade gifts, even if you are one of those people who bakes desserts to give to neighbors and friends. Try your local bakery or farmer’s market for homemade treats, because it is the thought that counts, not all that time you spent in the kitchen.

6. Opt for Convenience

You can cut corners by ordering prepared foods and desserts. You do not have to make your own pie crusts and casseroles, or you could get the whole meal catered. Also, you do not even have to bring out the fancy Chinaware and cookware.

Paper plates and cups, plastic flatware and disposable roasting and baking pans mean less cleanup. Yes, the thought of paper plates might make you cringe – me too – but if you are the one standing at the kitchen sink, you might want to think twice.

7. Seek Support

The best people to understand your challenges during the holiday time – and throughout the year – are others living with RA. These people can commiserate about difficulties, share advice and offer encouragement.

As for your friends and family, let them know when you are struggling or need extra help. If you want your loved ones’ support, you must tell them what you need.

If you find you are struggling with negative and depressed feelings for extended periods, you might be experiencing depression. Talk to your doctor or a therapist, so these feelings do not ruin the holidays for you.

8. Sleep

No matter how busy your days are, make sure you are getting at least six to eight hours of sleep every night. Lack of sleep is taxing on your body and could lead to a flare-up.

9. Keep Managing RA

The holidays are not an excuse to stop taking care of yourself.

Go to your doctor appointments and take your medications. Enjoy your favorite treats, but do not overindulge in foods that trigger flares. Also, make sure you are incorporating regular activity into your day.

Lastly, do not forget to take a breather and make time for yourself. Even if all you can spare is 15 minutes without distraction, take the time to reduce stress, restore your body’s inner calm and clear your head.

The Bottom Line

The holidays are full of shopping, decorating, preparing, cooking and baking and family. These things can add stress to your already busy life.

Don’t let the holidays with RA overwhelm you. Choose to spend it with people and doing activities that do not bring you stress. If your family stresses you, you are entitled to make other plans. Remember to pace yourself and take time to relax.