

HOLIDAYS

Managing chronic pain is difficult at the best of times so during the holidays it is important to manage your expectations. What we have done in the past – traditions and people who used to be part of our holiday season – may change over time. If you spend a lot of time with family, friends, or other groups during the holidays, discuss your holiday priorities with them so they're aware of your limitations and needs for help.

SHOP ONLINE (MOSTLY)

- With so many online stores to choose from, there has never been a better time to shop for holiday gifts from the comfort of your home. Make sure you have a shopping list and check it off as you go so you don't get side-tracked with purchases that can add extra strain on your bank account.
- The downside to online shopping is that you need to give yourself enough time for shipping so you may need to begin your holiday shopping earlier than you would if shopping in-person.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

- Managing chronic pain can be a full-time job, so the additional demands of the holiday season can feel overwhelming.
- Self-care means listening to your body and not letting the fear of missing out drive your decision-making. Be sure to continue practicing the same level of self-care during the holiday season that you would during the rest of the year. Plan recovery days into your schedule in case you inadvertently overextend yourself.

DITCH THE "SHOULD" AND LEARN TO SAY NO

- Don't focus on what you should do; instead, focus on what you can do – especially when it comes to making food and planning events during the holidays. You can still embrace tradition while saving energy and exertion by substituting home-cooked meals with pre-made dishes, cook-from-frozen meals or store-bought desserts.
- Your health should always take priority. Be gentle and kind to yourself and remember there's no need to apologize for prioritizing your well-being in any social setting.

CHECK IN WITH YOUR SUPPORTS

- During the holidays, we can find ourselves spending a lot of time with our families. If our families are understanding of our pain and compassionate about our limitations, this can be a time of comfort and joy. If they are not understanding, they can add stress and unrealistic expectations to your holidays. Prioritize spending time with people who are a support to you.

TRY SETTING THREE CLEAR CHECK-IN POINTS WITH YOUR SUPPORTERS OR THERAPEUTIC ALLIES

- During the first check-in, discuss your fears and concerns, organize your priorities and set some personal boundaries. Bounce ideas off your support person and set a date to check back in with them when you're in the midst of the holiday season.
- At your second check-in, assess how you're feeling and whether any old or new pain has arisen. Maybe you have managed to cope extraordinarily well, which is a perfect opportunity to acknowledge your success. This is also the time to address any concerns and re-commit to your self-care plan so you can keep yourself accountable to healthy, conscious action as the season progresses.
- At your final check-in, it's important to address any challenges that may have emerged, but also take time to celebrate the ways you practiced self-care and stuck to your plan.

RESOURCES:

- <https://www.liveplanbc.ca/pain-education/everyday-living/managing-pain-through-holiday-expectations>
- <https://creakyjoints.org/living-with-arthritis/say-no-to-plans-chronic-illness/>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/turning-straw-gold/201411/surviving-the-holidays-when-you-re-chronically-ill>