4 Tips to Help You Cope With MS and Cold Weather

by LIBBY SELINSKY

Coping With MS and Cold Weather

The snow is flying in and it is time to admit it: winter is here in full force. I have never been a snow bunny and I do not intend on becoming one. However, I have learned that the winter passes much more quickly and with much less stress, once I have my survival plan in place. If you do not have a plan in place, do not worry. We will explain how to cope with MS and cold weather.

I know there are plenty of you out there who live in nice, warm places, like Florida. Kudos to you or your ancestors, whoever it was that decided to live in a nice place where the snow does not fly and swimming outside is totally possible on Christmas. I applaud you during these cold months and I dream of living someplace like yours someday.

As it is, I live in Ohio. Ohio winters, while not the worst in the country, are not for the faint of heart. I live near Cleveland. Lake effect snow is just a fact of life here. We have it all: arctic winds, slush, ice, sleet, multiple blizzards a year, etc.

I remember my college roommate, who came from California, asking me in March of that year if spring ever comes in Ohio. Spring does come, eventually. Ohio is just really great at making you appreciate it once it does arrive. Kind of like how a lost person in the desert appreciates a tall, cold glass of water.

But I digress. MS and cold weather do not exactly go together, and my mission today is to tell you how I get through this frozen tundra of a season in one piece, with a smile on your face. There are three main things to concern yourself with: safety, comfort and entertainment.

1. Keep Warm on the Go

Safety comes first. Winter comes with all the normal checklists of safety requirements that we all need to think about. People with MS need to take that list and add their own personal touches to each line item in order to feel secure.

For instance, my car has nice new tires for the snow, great windshield wipers and a tune-up. It also has extra blankets in the back and hand warmers in the glove box. These things are great for anyone to have but I feel more attuned to having them since my legs like to go numb at the first sign of wind and I quickly lose my ability to understand my actual body temp.

2. Buy Appropriate Footwear

Ice is another big one for MS and cold weather. Before I had my first relapse, I could walk on ice like a pro. It is something we Ohio folk get quite good at. I have to admit that it was a point of pride for me to be able to wear my favorite high heels out on the iciest of nights and walk with confidence across an unsalted parking lot to a great

restaurant. I am not capable of this anymore. I have had to get creative with my footwear. I have had to reevaluate every pair I own. This is a big deal for me because I love shoes and I refuse to let stupid MS get in the way of me owning every gorgeous pair that I can afford.

My solution for this quandary is simple – boots. Boots are so wonderful. You can get boots in every size, shape or look. It is not too hard to find a beautiful pair of boots, with heels and tread no less, that will still look super stylish and sexy for a night out on the town. I have boots for every situation and need. My favorites on the coldest of days are those fuzzy shearling boots that everyone wears nowadays. They can look frumpy if worn too often, but I love sliding my toes into those cozy, furry boots. It is like walking on a cloud, and that is a feeling that I will always enjoy for as long as I still have feeling in my toes. They are the ultimate in comfort.

3. Stock Up on (Healthy) Comfort Food and Drinks

Speaking of comfort, let's move on. Comfort is important when it comes to dealing with MS and cold weather. But seriously, get me in one of my moods, when the days are at their coldest and take away my comfort and suddenly life seems bleak and my MS feels like a scourge that has infiltrated my life and taken away all of its joy. Most days, I can look around and find joy and beauty in the world, in my life. Comfort makes this outlook easier to attain. Winter can just feel so empty if I let it.

Warmth is the quickest way to serve up my comfort. My husband believes strongly in the power of a warm beverage, and I have adopted his belief. We love our warm beverages so much that we actually have a corner of our kitchen dedicated to a large tea selection, his favorite coffee and several hot chocolates to choose from for our son. My husband shows me he loves me by offering me a cup of tea at least once a day and I find comfort in the warmth and love there.

Another thing that gives me comfort is a well-stocked freezer filled with all of our favorite meals. I find it fun to make large portions of our most-loved comfort foods on the nights when my fatigue is under control. Right now I have tons of Christmas ham and bean soup stocked up in my freezer. I pull these babies out on the nights when the cold has zapped all of my energy. They are easy when I can feel the fatigue settling in and I know that I will be in hibernation mode a half hour after dinner.

It is a great thing to have healthy, heart-warming food on hand that just needs to be warmed up on those nights when I know I need a break. Treat yourself right and make room for those days when life is beginning to feel too heavy.

4. Plan to Get out of the House

Lastly, let's talk about entertainment when it comes to MS and cold weather. This can be the best part of winter if you play your cards right. I have figured out a great way of making sure that my family and I get out of the house as much as possible during the winter. Staying busy is really about going about your life in a tactical way: you have to decide that you are going to get out of the house and have all the tools in place.

We have a couple of foundational things in our house that set a good baseline. First, we have a membership to the local community center. It is a great gym with pools, exercise equipment and really everything our little heart's desire to stay active and in shape.

Going to the community center gives us multiple nights a week where we are busy and out of the house. Also, working up that heart rate is a great way of staying warm and using up my energy so that I go to bed and actually get some sleep. I know that there are plenty of you out there who struggle with your MS and sleep. Sleep loss directly affects my fatigue, so for me, a tired body is a happy body, without fatigue.

Another great thing that we do as a family is we have a season pass to Playhouse Square in Cleveland. It is a great thing to get to the city on a monthly basis. We have a nice dinner out and a great night seeing a show. Set up something that will take you out of your normal schedule at regular intervals. It will pass the time more quickly and with more excitement. You will be creating memories and that will bring joy to your life.

Joy is something we all need to seek out. These are the things that we carry with us through our days. These are the memories we create with the ones that we love. Before you know it, spring will be here and you will be basking in the glory of all the new life sprouting up around you.