Multiple Sclerosis Thanksgiving Advice

by LIBBY SELINSKY

Have an Amazing Thanksgiving Despite MS

Thanksgiving is on its way! I love Thanksgiving — it's a fantastic holiday. We don't have to buy anyone presents, we get to spend time with the people we love, and, best of all, we get to stuff ourselves, guilt-free.

Thanksgiving has the potential to be the most stress-free holiday of the year; however, it can turn out to be one of the most stressful holidays — it all depends on how you manage it.

I'm lucky because I have never been forced to follow one tradition year after year. My parents were divorced when I was young and my older sister and I were shuffled from one family to another every year. Add in the step-parents' extended families and we often ended up eating four dinners before the day was through!

Things were not traditional for us, but we did have one thing that always remained consistent throughout all of the years: we learned that Thanksgiving is to be spent appreciating the good people in your life; a holiday where we surround ourselves with the glories of the year's harvest.

It is the culmination of the bounties that feed our bodies and the bounties that feed our souls.

I deeply believe Thanksgiving should be filled with pleasure and happiness, wrapped in the warm glow of camaraderie, for every person. Logically, I know this is not the reality everyone faces. I have had some rough Thanksgivings too — I know it can be hard.

Worries Can Build

It is common to approach these yearly events with expectations and trepidations of what we are capable of or what other people might say or do. We all carry a certain load of baggage with us to these events. Multiple sclerosis is part of the baggage I carry.

Maybe I won't be able to have enough energy to get through the day, to cook, or to carry a pleasant demeanor throughout the dinner. Maybe my family will expect too much or Uncle Joe will bring me yet another article about some new MS treatment, cure or cause that I really don't feel like reading about.

There are so many possibilities, so many stresses, so many "what ifs" that we can play through our heads during the preamble of our November days. I believe it is our responsibility to deal with all of the things within our control before the holiday arrives:

- Do I want to go to the big family party or is it going to be too overwhelming and stressful?
- Who do I want to spend my holiday with and how can I make that happen?
- Do I really want to cook or should I let someone else do it?
- Is it better to have dinner at my home or should I go to dinner at my aunt's house?

I am sure you have an even longer list of questions circling your head. MS is tricky, because these questions we have can seem insignificant and dull. However to us, simple questions that go unanswered and ignored can manifest themselves in ways that literally tear at the fibers of our bodies.

MS taught me that stress is invisible, but it will not be ignored. Stress is an impatient beast that is full of substance and it will crush you if you deny it. So, you and I, we have to deal with our MS. We no longer have any room for denying our needs. Unfortunately, we used up all those punches on our cards. We must make choices now.

Next page: three things to remember when the holidays approach

Three Things to Always Remember

1. It's hard to put our needs first.

I know I am not alone in my struggle with placing my family's needs behind my own when necessary. Most people want the people that they love to be happy and to feel like their needs matter.

Remembering to care for your needs does not mean you are a selfish person; it only means you are a person who also has needs.

2. It's possible to fulfill our needs without forgetting about the people we love.

Fulfilling our own needs doesn't mean we clear the decks and stop considering the people around us. Fulfilling our needs means we are putting credence into our own importance to elevate our status to the level of the other important people of our lives.

3. We can have a great holiday doing what we want.

If you have been enjoying your holiday tradition year after year, then this is easy. If you have been having dinner with people that you don't want to spend time with, year after year, then you should give yourself permission to start a new tradition that is more fulfilling.

Creating Your Own Special Day

Creating a day worth cherishing, a day you will remember with fondness, doesn't have to be very hard. I have a few simple questions that, if answered honestly, will set the foundation for a really fun, stress-free day:

1. Is this what I want?

We all have some sort of plan that is already set in motion for the day. Maybe we are alone, maybe we are going to the in-laws, or maybe we are having the dinner at our house.

If the plans that you already have planned feel good when you think about them, then great — keep it up!

If you are thinking about the day with a sort of dread, then think about what it is that makes you uncomfortable, sad or stressed and then do something to alleviate that feeling. If you are alone, look around for people you know who might be in the same situation and invite them over for dinner.

If you have been cooking for many years, but feel like you don't have it in you to do it anymore, ask someone else to cook or throw around the idea of having dinner at someone else's home.

The point is to be happy. Just find a way; don't drudge through a tradition or situation that does not fit your life anymore.

2. Are these the people I want to spend my time with?

Find the people that you are thankful for and embrace them. There is no law out there that says you have to share dinner with people who cut you down or make you feel uncomfortable just because they are family. If you are finding you are spending your Thanksgiving regretting you weren't with the people that you really connect with, then be with the people that you enjoy.

3. What do I want to eat?

It's Thanksgiving. If you want it, eat it.

Be Thankful

Thanksgiving can be tricky and exhausting. It can also be everything you ever wanted. Take some time, think to yourself and give yourself permission to create a most thankful day.

I hope you all have a wonderful holiday. You are not alone in this journey. I wish you all nothing but full bellies and happy hearts.