Tips for Managing MS Over the Christmas Holidays

by ABIGAIL BUDD

Enjoying Christmas With MS

Does anyone else start to feel the panic about Christmas in the middle of November? We don't have Thanksgiving in the United Kingdom, so there's nothing to take the edge off the rising anxiety that kicks in mid-month and steadily builds until I'm a frantic mess at the end of December.

There's so much to do, but the endless tasks are so much harder for people with multiple sclerosis who have symptoms sabotaging everything! From shopping and wrapping gifts to planning and preparing a Christmas dinner party, there's just too much to do with so little time. However, this year doesn't have to be like that.

How to Manage Christmas With MS

In order to avoid overexerting, stressing, and panicking this holiday season, below I have some tips which may help you enjoy your Christmas with MS.

Christmas Cards and Wrapping Gifts

I usually have a ton of these to write, but can only manage around 10 before "MS hands" conspire against me. My writing gets more and more erratic and I drop the pen so frequently the cards are barely legible!

I always have a glass of wine on the go as I write the cards, and one year my son knocked the wine all over my stack of completed cards. You can imagine my fury at the thought of having to start again so I sent them anyway, wine stains and all!

As with writing endless cards, MS hands make wrapping presents a challenge.

Buying Presents and Food Shopping

Luckily, shopping malls are usually modern buildings designed with disabled people in mind, so getting around one is fairly easy on a normal shopping day. They turn into obstacle courses around Christmas, though, and you take your life into your own hands if you use a mobility scooter or wheelchair.

There are always displays of extra merchandise everywhere, making the shop floors smaller and harder to navigate. Add a million extra people who are all charging around above you, not looking down for obstacles like you! It can be a scary and dangerous place and I tend to avoid shopping.

With grocery shopping, factor in shopping carts bulging with food as an extra obstacle to negotiate.

Cooking

I don’t even know where to start writing about cooking on Christmas day. I couldn’t even lift the bird into the oven, let alone anything else, and I often sit there in an alcohol-fueled, guilt-ridden mood on Christmas day.

I watch my husband and other family members running around getting all the food ready and wish I could do something to help, but it’s just too hard. It doesn’t help when tactless, drunk relatives make hilarious comments either.

My brother-in-law delights in pointing out how little I do to help on Christmas day and I was reduced to tears last year at his remarks. We can reduce these feeling of guilt by planning, preparing and writing lists! We have 11 coming for lunch this year so I have to get my act together!

Here are some of my solutions to the Christmas problem:

Pace Yourself

Don’t try and write all cards at once. Do 10 a night, or however many your MS hands will allow, and you may even find it enjoyable! This goes for wrapping presents too; take your time and do a small pile at a time, rather than leaving the whole lot to do on Christmas Eve.

Shop Online

I don’t do any shopping anymore as it’s far too stressful. I honestly don’t know how disabled people used to buy stuff before the internet was invented! Be organized so retailers have enough time to get the goods to you, though — you can’t be a last-minute online shopper.

Delegate

I wouldn’t know where I’d be without my husband. He charges off to the supermarket with his list and has been known to go to more than one shop to get what we need. He does all the physical running around at Christmas, but he needs direction, so we make a good team.

Although it looks like I haven’t done anything, I’m the one orchestrating it all behind the scenes and it wouldn’t happen smoothly without me.

Another great job to delegate is decorating the tree. I supervise while my children decorate it, and although it would never win prizes, what it lacks in style we make up for in enthusiasm — and the children are always so proud of their creation!

When people ask if they can bring anything, take them up on it — it can reduce how much you need to do. I asked my sister to bring cheese, for example, and my mum is bringing dessert.

Prepare in Advance

There’s plenty of food preparation that can be done the night before, and I like to do as much as I can so it feels like I’ve contributed. Peeling sprouts and potatoes, making cauliflower cheese or dessert can all be done in advance, as can setting the table and making everything look just right.

Enjoy It

On the day, I have to sit back as the kitchen gets too hot for me and there’s nothing I can help with, but I can chat to our guests, make sure the children are having a nice time, and relax with a glass of bubbles or two!

It is what it is. You can’t change it, so don’t feel guilty about what you can’t get done — just make sure you contribute in whatever ways you can.