Tips for Enjoying the Holidays With Fibromyalgia

by ERIC PATTERSON

Surviving the Holidays With Fibromyalgia

Have you noticed that the leaves have fallen from the trees and flurries are beginning to drift from the sky? Commercials are highlighting the season's must-have toys. The holidays are here, but holidays with fibromyalgia may prove to be a challenge.

Many people greet the holidays with a high dose of pessimism. This viewpoint can be triggered by negative past experiences, the way your fibromyalgia symptoms flare at this time of year, or a combination of the two.

What you may not realize is pessimism only breeds more pessimism. Waiting for bad things to happen only ensures that they will, as the good goes unnoticed.

Fibromyalgia adds pain and feelings of depression while taking away energy, motivation and hope. The impact is both physical and mental. The holidays are typically a time of high stress as family functions, buying gifts and weather changes bring about social, financial and environmental stress.

The cold, dry weather can cause fibromyalgia flares, tighten joints and reduce the ability to exercise, as going for walks in the ice and snow may be hazardous.

It may feel like the odds are stacked against you and it would be easier to hibernate through the holiday season until the New Year. As appealing as this may be, it only represents an opportunity lost. Choose to move towards enjoying the holidays with fibromyalgia.

Tips for Coping During the Holidays With Fibromyalgia

The holidays can bring out depression, anxiety and despair in some. Having fibromyalgia puts you at greater risk of these unwanted feelings.

Work to avoid these trends and find the positive aspects of the holiday season. Seeing the rest of the season through a more optimistic lens will make everything more desirable. Here’s how.

Reflect on the Year

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Choose to learn from the last year by taking an objective inventory. Look at the previous 365 days. How were they? What are your regrets? What were your successes?

Recall that depression distorts your perceptions, so work to maintain objectivity. Find ways to repeat the good and to avoid the bad to make next year as rewarding as possible.

Find Gratitude

Too often people find themselves firmly planted in the quagmire of negativity. Make the conscious decision to find gratitude in your life. You already know the list of problems is long, but focusing more on the positives makes the negatives look smaller and less significant.

The more you focus on something, the larger it becomes. You have the power to control your focus.

Consider making a thankfulness wreath. In this project, you list what you are thankful for on individual construction paper leaves and pin those to a foam ring making a wreath. It is a representation of your gratitude that also makes a seasonal decoration.

Find Hope in the Future

Hope is one of the best defenses you have against physical and mental illness. If your physical symptoms are worse, look for hope in other areas. If mental symptoms are worse, look for hope in physical areas.

Fibromyalgia tries to convince you that you should give up, but hope exists if you are willing to turn over enough stones to find it.

Renew Your Faith

If you are feeling burned out from the shopping, food and commercialism of the holidays, move to another path. This time of year is the best time to focus or refocus on your religious and spiritual beliefs.

If it has been a while, find another service, church or belief system that works well for you. Spirituality is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and luckily there are so many variations available. With some work, you might be able to find the best fit for you.

Setting Goals

Establishing goals is appropriate anytime, but especially at the onset of the holiday season.

What events do you want to attend? To what level do you want to shop? Do you want to host a holiday dinner? These questions force you to think about issues that you may have been avoiding and help you to begin to formulate goals.

Goals give your life direction and meaning. Without goals, you are prone to accomplish little, which can lead to feelings of worthlessness and regret.

On the other hand, having goals that are too far-reaching will leave you feeling disappointed and frustrated with your own abilities. Here’s how to make the best possible holiday goals.

Less Specific

Add flexibility and remove rigidity to your goals to avoid a letdown. Good goals tend to be specific but consider making your holiday goals more broad and generalized. Planning to make an appearance at three out of four holiday events and enjoying yourself is better than an overly-rigid plan to attend all holiday functions and stay the entire time.

More Realistic

Be sure to set realistic expectations for yourself. If you have been unable to attend any holiday parties over the last four years because of your fibromyalgia, do not set a goal of attending 15 this year. The disappointment of missing a goal will make you less likely to accomplish the next one.

Revise your goal to include only one holiday party. This way, the loss will be less negative if you do not make it, while the completion will still give a positive boost.

Get Creative

Inspect the barriers that stopped you from accomplishing your goals over the last year. Finding trends and patterns will give you more information needed to find success.

Use your creativity to find a way to avoid the barrier while still completing your goal. Encourage friends and family to give you their feedback and solutions. Plan to start new traditions that fit in better with your current functioning and lifestyle. Sometimes, the best traditions are the ones you begin.

Holiday Communication

A major stress for people around the holidays is the family interaction. Even if you are fortunate enough to have a strong relationship with your family, you may not appreciate the focus and attention given to your symptoms.

Perhaps, some people only talk to you about your fibromyalgia, while others completely ignore it. Finding the desired balance proves difficult for many. Here's how to tell your family what you think.

Be Assertive

If your communication is not assertive, it is not as good as it could be. The cornerstone of assertive communication is expressing yourself calmly and clearly while respecting the views of the people you are speaking to.

Assertive communication identifies your feelings, the trigger of your feelings and what others can do to improve the situation. Be realistic with yourself, though. Using assertive communication does not mean that others will follow. The only one you can control is you.

Also, do not reserve assertive communication for making negative statements to others. Find balance in your own communication by giving compliments and credit to others when warranted.

Listen Up

What you say is only the first half of good communication. Listening to the other person is equally as important. Your fibromyalgia is likely a disadvantage when it comes to listening as you find yourself being distracted by pain, or your emotional outlook distorts the way you perceive the conversation.

If this is the case, ask the other person to write repeat or rephrase what they told you. Checking and rechecking with the speaker is a great way to ensure the proper message is received.

Communicate Early

Waiting until an hour before the holiday dinner to ask questions or request a change is not advantageous. The late notice will most likely not be well-received and could trigger anger or confusion; neither is desired.

Also, waiting allows pressure and the emotional aspect to build in you. Emotion serves to diminish the efficacy of your communication because you will be less objective and more sensitive to others' responses.

If you are lacking a group of people to converse with, work hard to seek out appropriate avenues to build new supports online and in person. If you desire more relationships, go where the people are.

Fibromyalgia can make you want to give up before you even begin the fight. Work smart, not hard, by following the tips above to find success without depleting your limited resources of time, energy and patience. The only

failure is not trying.