# Getting Through the Holidays With Lupus

by ANNA SCANLON

## Coping With (and Enjoying) the Holidays With Lupus

The holidays can be equally exciting and stressful for people with or without lupus. Of course, this depends on a huge variety of factors, like whether or not you are spending them with your family or alone and how you are feeling at that time.

Between getting all your preparation done for your regular job, holiday shopping, cooking, traveling and prepping to host family and friends or visiting family and friends, the entire season can feel all too overwhelming.

During this time, it is especially important to listen to your body and what it is telling you and not to stress yourself out too much.

### Visiting Family and Friends

When I visit family and friends during the holidays, I make certain they know that I am going to need time to rest. Most of my family and friends are very aware of my lupus, so typically it is not an issue and most people will be flexible (if they are good friends, that is).

Of course, not everyone is going to be and some people may take your illness personally or even accuse you of being ill at certain times either to spite them personally, or because you are trying to get out of an event. I have been accused of this several times over the holidays, particularly when getting together with extended family I have not seen in years and who does not see how my lupus operates on a daily basis.

Because lupus is so fickle, it can be difficult for others to understand, which will stress you out and in turn make you feel worse. Personally, I choose to stop seeing friends who do not understand lupus after giving them a good benefit of the doubt, but sometimes you cannot do that with family.

Instead, even though it is irksome, you just have to smile through your teeth and go rest when you need to. Really, your body is more important than the opinion of your 76-year-old great uncle you only see twice a year. Use Elsa's motto from Frozen and “Let it go!”

### Gift Shopping

Shopping for the holidays season can be stressful for lupus patients, as it often involves lots of walking, standing around and potentially spending money that you do not have. If you are short on cash from being unable to work, try making something for your friends or family members.

It may not be as “wow” as an iPad, but it will be treasured for longer than one year (when they need the new iPad that will inevitably be coming out).

Making something does not have to mean a fancy Pinterest-worthy DIY (those make my self-esteem rot when I attempt them). You can do things like write short stories, poems or give baked goodies to the people of your choice.

You can even put together inexpensive pamper packages for your friends by purchasing a mug, some marshmallows, hot chocolate packs and candy canes and putting them together. It is a quick and easy idea that does not take much time or effort and they will be grateful you thought of them!

To minimize my own stress, I try to do all of my shopping online weeks in advance. This way everything gets delivered to my door. It is easy and simple and helps you avoid long lines and crowded malls.

**It's Okay to Say 'No'**

Above all, be kind to yourself. Don't make commitments you are iffy about keeping.

If your son's teacher wants you to make four dozen cupcakes for the school Christmas party, do not be afraid to say no. If your pastor asks you to come help decorate for Christmas and your joints are swelling up that day, feel free to decline and stay home and rest.

Your health is more important than anything else this holiday season, and you will want to ensure you can attend the commitments and parties and festivities that matter most to you.

If you know you will be too exhausted to wake up in time to see your kids open their gifts if you go to midnight mass, then skip it. If you know your mother-in-law drives you up the wall, plan to destress after Christmas dinner with a warm bath and some hot tea. Don't drive yourself crazy.

**Being Alone**

While family and big holiday gatherings may be a source of concern for some with lupus (I always feel nervous to go places with people in case I start to feel sick and the other person wants to stay longer), for other people, the crippling loneliness of the holidays can be just as bad.

Some of us do not have family to visit or cannot travel home because of work commitments or financial constraints. Many people without family to visit can feel totally brushed aside by friends if they (understandably) cannot take too much time to be with you and need to attend to their own family commitments.

If this is the case for you, plan some activities for yourself so you do not let the depression set in. Even with lupus, you may want to get out and do activities in the community that help you meet people, or at least get you out of your own head.

Check your local events calendar at your church or synagogue or other place of worship, as most will have meals and other events around the holiday season. It may feel awkward to go on your own, but you will definitely feel even a little bit less depressed after doing so.

If you will be alone on Christmas, plan to go to a community holiday gathering or a church service just so you will be around people. Even if you are not religious, the carol singing and festive food will help you feel less alone.

Also, call a friend and see if they can drop by for a couple of hours on Christmas day. Make sure you buy some Christmas cake or make some hot chocolate for you and your friends stopping over if you are able to.

For me, finding time to relax is one of the most important aspects of the holiday season. In between the festivities and gift giving (or being totally alone, which I have, unfortunately done before), try to also schedule in some you time.

I find that with lupus, I often neglect pampering and other things that most other people are able to do because I

figure my excessive sleeping and relaxing is pampering enough. Instead of being in that mindset, make time to give yourself a pedicure or get one done if you can afford it.

Buy some bath bombs and have a soothing bath for an hour while sipping egg nog or hot chocolate. Do your nails while watching your favorite movie or a marathon of your favorite TV show. And most important of all, turn your phone off during that time so it is all about you!

I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season, whether it is spent alone or with friends and family.