Coping With Lupus in the Fall

by BARBARA LEECH

Lupus in the Fall: Fall Activities and Their Impact on Lupus

Fall is just around the corner, so apple picking, my kids' soccer practices, costumes and trick-or-treating are on the calendar once more, and I am regretfully saying good-bye to warm weather.

Cold temperature is really hard on lupus and last fall and winter I found the big bad wolf that is lupus spent its time in hot pursuit of me. My body cannot take the icy air one typically endures from late October through late April in the state I live in.

Truth be told, I dread this time of year. Everyone around me finds the air so crisp and refreshing, but for me, the drop in temperature causes so much pain in my body that I cannot function normally.

There are so many outside activities that are expected of a parent at this time of year. Soccer practice will begin soon and once those games are in full swing, it will require hours at the field each Saturday morning, all in frosty temperatures that will be complete torture for me.

I hate grinning and trying to bear it, but my kids don't deserve an absent mother either. Being a lupus mom, I am always in this struggle between what I need to do for my family and what I need to do for my health.

I have come to find strategies I must use to get through some of it. Here are a few you can try to take on all the activities of the coming months and how to survive lupus in the fall.

Pick Your Battles

I really try and make the focus on what really matters. If going apple picking is an important tradition, go on a day you are feeling up to it and that is not too chilly. If it is cold out, dress in layers.

Rather than focus on how long you stay at the orchard picking apples, focus on the fun you have in the moment. Take pictures. Pack a thermos of hot apple cider to help shake the chill once you are back in the car.

Set Expectations That the Excursion May End Before the Kids Want It To

Kids hate surprise/abrupt endings to fun. I explain before we head out that if it gets to be too cold or after a certain amount of time, we will call it quits and go.

I let them know when I am starting to wear down and say, "10 more minutes and then we need to go." Warnings ease the whining.

Plan for Cold Days

Besides dressing in layers, I also get chemical hand warmers (found at the local home improvement store or in the hunting section of most department stores). Shake these packs up and you have heat in your pockets for hours, which is great if you have Raynaud's syndrome as I do.

For my kids' soccer games, I try and arrive to the field early so I get parking close to the action. If need be, I can slip back into the car to warm up and still keep an eye on my little players on the field.

I also keep a fleece blanket in the car at all times to bundle up when the cold gets to be too much for my body. Hot coffee also helps warm my hands as I hold it.

Accept Help If You Need It

There have been awful years in terms of trick-or-treating weather, nights where it was raining or flurries were coming down. Those years I gave in and accepted assistance in making the activity happen for my kids.

Basically, I drove the SUV, heat blasting, as I followed the kids through the neighborhoods — parking at the end of each driveway. My sister in-law walked with them, since she offered to take them with her own kids if it would help.

Truth is, I needed help and I accepted it so my kids could still enjoy the activity they look forward to. I would not let lupus steal that from them, even if it meant accepting a helping hand, which I hate doing.

I still got to see everything, and heard their stories as they came back periodically to warm up and dry off for a bit. I missed very little, but stayed out of the weather.

Remember to Shield From the Sun

Even when the weather turns colder, the sun can affect me. A couple of hours out in the sun can leave me with a rash or feeling ill for a few days. I make an effort to remember sunblock and my sunglasses even though others seem to no longer be giving UV rays much thought.

Since my memory is not great either, I keep some sunblock and a hat in the car just in case I forget to plan ahead.

Eat Healthy, Even on Busy Days

If you are like me, running to get kids to the field on time and sticking around to watch, you can't always have time to cook a healthy meal. But fast food is not an option for me with lupus.

Eating from the drive-through induces a flare just about every time I do it, so it is not worth the convenience of an instant dinner. Instead, I utilize my crockpot to cook the main part of our meal and then steam some veggies for a few minutes when we return home.

Do I like doing this? No, I hate it! But it keeps me in better health than if I slip up and eat something unhealthy, just because it is easier to get it on the table.

The trick to dealing with these annual fall expectations is to alter your plans a bit and make them as lupus-friendly as possible. It is not about caving in to the demands of lupus as much as it is compromising for the benefit of your body.

If you are like me, you still want to make these memories with your family, but not at the expense of your health. Accommodating your lupus is an important step and can make these challenges a little less daunting and impactful.