

*Living with Chronic Illness****Ten Holiday Survival Tips***

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The holidays can be a stressful time for nearly anyone. But for those with chronic illness, the schedule, social demands, and additional things to do can simply be impossible. People with multiple sclerosis, multiple chemical sensitivity, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and other invisible illnesses appear normal, but have a disability which makes day-to-day living difficult. The increased demands of the holidays can easily become overwhelming and frustrating, especially when family and friends do not understand the extent of an invisible disability. Here are ten tips to surviving and enjoying the holidays.

1. Start planning and shopping early by making a to do list.
2. Avoid the stress, crowds, exposures, and hassles of shopping by employing alternatives such as buying gifts online.
3. Take care of yourself by sticking to your normal foods and routine.
4. When entertaining, stipulate the rules on party invitations.
 - If no fragrances are allowed, provide safe clothing and shower access for guests to use when arriving.
 - If you don't want to entertain all night, be sure to specify the time the party ends.
 - Ask guests to bring a pot luck dish to reduce energy expended cooking and cleaning up.
 - Ask guests to help out.
5. When going to a gathering away from home:
 - If dietary needs may not be met, bring a dish of food that you tolerate to eat and share with others.
 - Bring your own vehicle and make a short appearance at a gathering if you are unable to stay for the duration or your family wishes to stay longer.
 - If fragrances are of concern, wear layered clothing or a cover-up and bring a mask. A paraplegic would not show up without a wheel chair. You should not show up without your medical equipment either.
6. Plan to do nothing or lighten your schedule a few days before and after an event.
7. Just say no. It's okay to pass on activities and outings, especially if accommodations will not be made for you. Your first priority is you.
8. Speak to your friends and family in advance to outline your needs and make plans.
9. Avoid making commitments you may not be able to keep. This will lessen the pressure you feel and you'll win more points if you say maybe and no show than if you say yes and no show. And if you happen to show up in spite of "maybe", everyone will be delighted.
10. Pace yourself. It's better to enjoy only one activity than be in bed for two weeks because you attempted several activities.

