

A GIFT for the Holidays

By Sharon Weiner

Does the thought of another holiday season fill you with joyful anticipation or overwhelm you with fear and dread? The average person considers the holidays at least somewhat stressful. For people with CRPS, who are already struggling to cope with daily life in general, the added demands and stresses of the holidays can trigger a flare of RSDS/CRPS. While you may not be able to totally avoid all stress, you can reduce your stress level significantly by giving yourself a G.I.F.T.

G – GUILT MUST GO.

Guilt is born when you fail to live up to your own expectations for yourself. Year after year you are bombarded with a “magical mythical model” of the idyllic holiday scene – complete with family, friends, food and festivities, encompassed in a spirit of peace and goodwill for all. If this is the holiday image you are trying to achieve, it is time for a reality check. The fact is, you have a CRPS that limits what and how much you can do. It’s time to stop blaming yourself because you can’t provide the elaborate holiday festivities you once did or because you can’t do everything you think your family expects you to do. It’s time to remember what the holidays are really about – expressing your love and thankfulness for family and friends.

I – Importance rules

Do not let the holiday season descend upon you like a heavy weight. Decide which aspects of the holidays are most important to you and your immediate family. Focus on accomplishing the most important things and let everything else go. (If spending quality time together visiting is more important than a huge home-cooked meal, have your holiday dinner at a restaurant so you can relax and enjoy each other’s company.)

F – Family matters

During the holiday season, extended families come together, often traveling great distances. While it may be wonderful to visit with relatives, you need to plan ahead to avoid being physically drained. Whether they come to your home or you go to theirs, talk to them ahead of time and explain that you have a chronic illness which limits your activity and requires you to rest at regular intervals. Keep in mind that your first responsibility is to yourself and your immediate family.

Good communication with your family is a key to a happy holiday season. However, sometimes when we are not feeling well our attempts at communication may sound more like whining or complaining. Try to speak in a calm, logical, factual manner as you make plans or explain your limitations to family and friends.

T – THINK AHEAD

Large portion of holiday stress comes from the last-minute rush to get everything done. . Put your plans on paper so that they are not lost in an unexpected flare up. Make a gift list, write out menus and formulate a “to do” agenda. The next step is to simplify and delegate. Look at each item on your list and ask yourself, “is this really important to me and/or my family?” If not, take it off the list. If it meets the importance criteria, ask, “can someone else do this for me?” If so, delegate it. If not, your final question should be, “what is the easiest way to accomplish this?” Sometimes we make things harder on ourselves than they have to be simply because we don’t take time to figure out whether there is an easier way

Once you have fine-tuned your list, look at the remaining items and try to accomplish at least a portion of your plan each week. Accept the fact that you will have some bad days. Allow yourself extra time in your schedule so that one or two bad days will not ruin your entire holiday season. By not waiting until the last minute to do everything, you might just have enough energy left over to actually enjoy the holidays.