

Happy (Enough) Holidays



It's that time of year again—the time of family gatherings, merriment and yummy goodies.

But it's also the season of shopping lists, endless gift wrapping and running from one holiday program to the next.

Yes, while the holiday season is one of the most joyful times of the year, it is also one of the busiest and potentially most stressful. Before you start making elaborate plans this year, let me gently caution: Try not to add more stress for yourself. This year (and the last!) has been stressful enough; we know that [stress is not good for MS](#) and can even cause worsening of symptoms.

Maybe this holiday, we can just do **enough**.

We can do enough to make merry, lasting memories with our children, without putting extra pressure on ourselves. Here are 4 ideas:

- **Rethink Traditions:** I'm looking at you, Christmas cards. If it brings you joy, go for it. But if it's overwhelming to order cards, address them, and get them in the mail, then skip it this year. Post a family picture on social media with a heartfelt holiday greeting instead. The same can be said for meals. Does your family **have** to have a huge turkey dinner? What if you tried something new this year and ask every family member to pick one dish? You might end up with a main course of pizza and a side of French fries, but involving everyone, especially kids, makes it fun, special and easier.

- **Downsize Decorations:** This is a hard one for me. I would love to have a dazzling, Griswold-like display of Christmas lights... but creating that kind of display is a lot of extra work and stress. Instead, I plan to focus on smaller things that will have a big impact, like letting my kids each pick a new ornament for the tree or letting them each get a mini tree for their own room. That way it's personal and special to them, rather than something splashy that will require extra planning, set-up and takedown.
- **Say No Without Guilt:** This is so hard, but so important. Living with MS, especially since the onset of COVID, during the holidays can be a recipe for fatigue and burnout. That's why it's important to protect your precious time and energy. So, if you get asked to take something on (organize a holiday meet-up; bake three dozen cookies for Christmas dinner, etc.), it's OK to say no. If you're trying to decide, ask yourself:
 - Do I have time for this?
 - Even if I do, do I also have the physical and emotional energy and stamina for this?
 - Will doing this deplete my energy, thus taking away quality time with my family?

Let your answers dictate whether or not you commit to something.

- **Plan Low-Key Fun:** Holiday break can be a great time to plan fun family excursions, from sledding to bowling to going to the movies. But if it feels like too much, you could opt instead for some home-based activities. Try a Christmas movie marathon, or a family board game tournament.

Remember: You don't need to have grand plans this holiday season; it's OK to just do enough. Your kids will remember the time you spent together and the fun you had.

Let's give ourselves the gift of grace, use this holiday season to relax and recharge, then go into 2022 with all the joy and hope we can.

Editor's Note: Learn more about mindfulness and energy conservation strategies to successfully manage holiday stress in this edition of [Ask an MS Expert](#).