

# Guest Post: Surviving the Holidays

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Halloween has come and gone. It's November, and new made-for-TV holiday movies are already airing, not to mention the holiday merchandise ready for purchase. The holidays can be a time of celebration and reflection, gathering with loved ones, and a time to refocus on what's important. The holidays can also be a time of great sadness, estrangement, stress, and anxiety.

So, how can you make sure the holidays are rejuvenating, enjoyable, and peaceful? One of the biggest tips for survival is this: Be flexible and relax. If you're driving and get stuck in traffic, take a deep breath and focus your mind elsewhere. If you're headed to the airport, remember that flights can be delayed and cancelled, so have a backup plan. If you need to stay in a hotel, make sure to call ahead and ask the questions you need answers to.

Unexpected things can still come up, but to the extent possible, ask as many questions as you can as you are making plans.

In my case, the main questions are about accessibility. As a wheelchair user, I have faced barriers to entering stores, getting through a restaurant, finding curb cutouts, fitting into hotel bathrooms, or even getting around the bed. Wheelchairs come in different sizes, but an accessible room needs to take that into account. And it's not just me who has to fit into bathrooms and bedrooms. My caregiver needs space to maneuver around to help me. Here's a

story for you: I truly appreciate sidewalks because they are usually smooth. But there was an unforgettable time when I was wheeling from a concert venue back to the hotel and the sidewalk was narrow and overgrown with tree roots. Plus, it was dark and it was raining. How much good is a narrow, overgrown sidewalk for a wheelchair user? The concert was worth it, but the sidewalk situation was scary.

Part of relaxing and being flexible during the holidays (and anytime) is setting realistic goals and expectations. Don't plan too much and don't plan too little. It starts with being aware of what your needs are and what you can handle. Evaluate yourself and your circumstances, and then plan accordingly. The more you know about yourself and choose to approach situations with a problem-solving mindset, the more likely you are to discover solutions.

Remember, getting upset is emotionally and physically draining and not helpful. Here's a suggestion: Choose a relaxation method to go to when under stress, like repeating comforting and empowering thoughts to yourself. Be open to trying different coping strategies. It may take some trial and error to figure out what works best for you.

There are ways to prepare mentally for the holidays by shifting your mindset, but there are also practical steps to take. For example, if you have dietary needs, you should develop a strategy to keep your health on track.

The holidays usually offer us no shortage of unhealthy foods, but you can still monitor your intake. I've learned how rotten I feel when I don't eat enough healthy foods, and when I eat too much food. How you feel physically influences your ability to enjoy the holidays. Healthy eating, exercising, and getting enough sleep are all important.

The holidays can be a stressful time of year. But, there are strategies that can help. First, planning ahead is key. Second, relax your mind and let go of what you can't control. Getting angry will help no one and instead will negatively affect your body and mind. Set realistic expectations and don't compare your holiday activities to those of others. Help yourself physically by eating healthy and getting enough sleep. All of these practices for success involve listening to your body and your mind. Become in tune with yourself and slow down enough to do so. Don't let this time of year stress you out. If you look for joy, you will find it.