

the happiest **HOLIDAYS** **EVER**

LOVE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON
WITH THESE TIPS TO
SLASH STRESS AND STRAIN.

BY JUDY ALEXANDRA DIEDWARDO

With all of the hullabaloo surrounding the holidays, feeling overwhelmed and avoiding the pitfalls that can derail your health can feel like a full-time job. But nothing cuts holiday stress better than a good plan and a few basic ground rules for the mind, body and pocketbook.

"I've had to make changes in the way we celebrate, and found that I'm doing less and enjoying more," says Cynthia Ewer, who has fibromyalgia and founded the OrganizedHome.com and OrganizedChristmas.com websites. She also wrote *Houseworks: How to Live Clean, Green and Organized at Home* (Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 2009).

We've consulted a number of experts for reliable, arthritis-friendly strategies to keep your holidays healthy, happy and fun. Here are 22 ways you can have your best holiday season yet.

easy **DECORATING**

STICK TO "THE RULE OF 3"

Keep decorating limited to three prime locations, advises Ewer. "The front door, a focal point in the main living area such as a mantel or coffee table, and the Christmas tree," Ewer says, or another focal point if you don't have a tree. "You'll express the spirit of the season without doing yourself in with decorating overkill."

DIVIDE AND DECORATE

If you're set on a whole-house holiday makeover, plan to do it in stages. One smart strategy: Begin by laying out all decorations on tables or counters to reduce bending and reaching. Decide what will go where, and then organize items by room. Before you decorate, use your holiday boxes or storage containers to stash everyday bric-a-brac. When you start decorating, shoot for a maximum of one room per day.

SWAP LABOR

Help a friend deck her halls in exchange for her help with yours.

LOG ON FOR A TREE

Instead of roaming Christmas tree lots, kick off your boots and cruise online farms (christmasfarms.com or thefreshchristmastree.com) for that perfect tree or wreath, delivered to your door. Or save your joints even more and order a faux tree – pre-decorated, lights and all – at Target.com or another retailer.

SIZE IT RIGHT

Choose a tree that's shorter than you to minimize reaching and straining joints.

USE WHEELS

Store holiday decorating items on rolling racks or a flat dolly, so you can roll them in when you're ready, says Ewer. Place the Christmas tree on a rolling stand so you can turn the tree to decorate it instead of reaching around it.

SHARE THE JOY

Invite family and friends to a tree-trimming party and ask them to contribute an ornament to the tree or help hang yours. You'll have a fully trimmed tree before the eggnog runs out, and they'll get a fun start to the season.

stress-free SHOPPING

Preseason Prep

Nothing ensures a low-stress holiday more than having a solid plan, says Ewer. One of her favorite features on OrganizedChristmas.com: a free, six-week Christmas Countdown, which "breaks down preparations and planning into weekly assignments," she says. "You'll save money, cut holiday stress, and stay in control of holiday decision-making."

Try these additional tips to get ready early.

GEAR UP FOR GUESTS. If you're playing host, recruit a friend to help rearrange furniture if needed, put clean sheets on all bedding and stock up on supplies to whittle your last-minute to-do list.

HEAD OFF GIFT ANXIETY. Keep track of gift recipients' clothing sizes and color preferences, and jot down gift ideas so you won't get stumped at the last minute.

GET READY TO WRAP. Set up an area for gift-wrapping – clear of daily clutter and with a surface high enough so you don't have to lean over and strain your back.

TAKE A TIP FROM SANTA

Make a list and check it twice! Shop online as much as possible, but if you're going to the mall, figure out who's getting which gifts, and where to buy them before you head out. This will keep you from wandering the mall aimlessly or making extra trips there.

CHOOSE A THEME

Limit gift buying to a theme – such as gifts for the home or gifts you can eat. Doing so may mean one trip to one store or online location, says Ewer.

BE AN EARLY BIRD

Shop before the holiday rush – but if you've already missed that window, shop early in the day, when crowds are smaller, to minimize stress and your time standing in line.

PACE YOURSELF

Shop for an hour or less on each outing. If you're planning a longer shopping trip, take breaks to simply sit and rest every 15 to 30 minutes.

GET CART SMART

Stash your packages in a folding shopping cart (available at amazon.com and some hardware stores) to avoid the strain of carrying them. After the holiday season, use it for grocery shopping, too.

DON'T WRAP

Save your hands from all the cutting, taping and ribbon tying by placing gifts in decorative holiday bags with festive tissue paper, or by taking advantage of gift-wrapping services available at most stores and online retailers.

perfect PARTY PLANNING

GET A PARTY IN A BOX

Save energy, money and time by buying disposable tableware, decorations and party favors from an online supplier like Oriental Trading Company or Unwrap a Party (orientaltrading.com, unwrapaparty.com).

ORDER IN

Who says you have to cook? If you can't hire a caterer, check for simple finger foods in the freezer section of a warehouse store like Costco or Sam's Club. Or order plates of hors d'oeuvres and desserts from a local restaurant or grocery store.

RECRUIT SOME "ELVES"

Hire some teenage relatives or friends' kids to help with decorating and entertaining – answering the door, taking coats and bags, passing food platters and cleaning up after the party. Or check with a caterer to help you hire a professional wait and bartending staff. "Your only job as the hostess is to look beautiful and have a great time," says Park Avenue Party Planners' Kelly McGuire-Rafferty, a chef and caterer in New York and Palm Beach, Fla.

WARM AT ONCE

Rather than reheating previously prepared dishes one at a time in the microwave, cover the dishes and place them all in a 200-degree oven 30 to 40 minutes before serving. You'll save stress and energy.

KEEP YOUR BAR SIMPLE

Offer sparkling and regular water, white and red wine and one themed drink, like sparkling pomegranate juice with a lime wedge or hot chocolate with peppermint sticks. Fewer choices mean less work.

CUT CLEANUP HASSLES

Use paper or plastic dishes that can be tossed when guests leave. Soak pots, pans, china and stemware overnight; tackle these the next morning. Save heavy lifting, like rearranging furniture, for the following day, when you're refreshed and rested. 🍷

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➔ Get more tips to a stress-free holiday season at ArthritisToday.org/ND11.

