

Environmental News

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Enjoying the Holidays

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People with environmentally-related health conditions frequently report disrupted relationships with family and friends, social isolation, and reduced activities of daily living and leisure activities. Often, they change their self perception and the way they conduct their lives to accommodate health conditions such as fibromyalgia (FM), chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS). Several factors such as weather, sedentary lifestyle, stress or being overactive affects their symptoms and thereby their choices. As the holidays quickly approach, strategies to enjoy and cope with social activities need to be discussed. List the challenges you anticipate, in order to enjoy a special Christmas event such as a neighbourhood open house. Then, develop a plan to accommodate your environmentally-linked condition.

Challenges and Developing a Plan

Common challenges faced by environmentally-linked conditions are:

Pain

Quite often, patients with fibromyalgia express living with constant pain as a reason for not being socially active. They noted that long bouts of engagement in one activity can worsen pain for days (Arnold et al, 2008). Plan rest days prior to and on the day of the social outing. Take your pain medication. Limit the social outing to 2 to 3 hours and listen to your body. If you start becoming uncomfortable, smile and say your good-byes.

Fatigue

Fatigue (or lack of energy) is one of the worst symptoms associated with

fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. Pace yourself to ensure that you are rested for that special outing. Try to plan social activities when you tend to have your energy spurt. As the hostess/host of Christmas dinner, delegate activities such as: decorating, setting the table, and cleaning up. Have your guests also help by bringing a potluck dish. Enjoy the day, and if necessary, steal away from your visitors for a short rest period/nap.

Cognitive impairment

People with environmentally-linked conditions state that their memory and thought processes often affect their ability to focus and to express themselves clearly. They feel more disorganized, and find it an effort to plan and be socially active. Discuss upcoming social events with family members and/or friends. Agree which events will cause less discomfort, depletion of energy or less environmental exposures. Plan to attend these events and then mark it on your calendar.

Emotional impact:

Acute anxiety, panic or depression can impact on social activities. Patients with FM, CFS and MCS have expressed feelings of embarrassment, frustration, guilt and isolation (Arnold et al, 2008). Embarrassment is associated with the lack of social acceptance of environmentally-linked conditions. Share pertinent information about your health condition with your family and friends.

Functional impact

FM, CFS and MCS can affect a person's ability to establish and maintain emotional and physical contact. In a recent study, many patients stated "they were unable to plan social events because they could not predict how they would feel and were unable to maintain friendships or make new friends" (Arnold et al, 2008). Share your concerns and feelings with your family and friends. Plan for short visits or have telephone conversations to keep in contact.

People with environmentally-linked conditions may experience extreme sensitivity to almost everything—to light, to sound, to temperature—as well as being extremely sensitive to odors and chemicals commonly found in perfumes, cosmetics, aftershave lotions, household cleaners, etc. Often, they are highly

sensitive to variations in weather such as changes in barometric pressure and the onset of winter and summer. Many are on modified diets and they may have an increased risk for an infection because their immune systems are weakened. Do what you can to control the situation. Ask family and friends if they are willing to have a scent-free celebration in their home and if necessary, bring your own food. If you can't avoid exposures, suggest another event that you feel more comfortable attending.

More tips on Social Activities

When you have environmentally-linked conditions, any big event seems to spark fear of a flare, loss of energy, or risk of exposure. **However, socialization can boost your immune system and improve your health!**

- 1. Schedule a spa day:** A massage, manicure, pedicure, or facial, for example, will boost your immune system and improve your mood. Body care is important and a visit to a chemically sensitive salon or spa can be cleansing for the body and spirit.
- 2. Exercise:** You can loosen toxins in your body by walking the dog, dancing with your partner or even doing some stretching. Consider taking pilates/yoga classes. Exercise will increase your body strength and function and allow you to bond with family or make new friends.
- 3. Eat, drink and be merry within limits.** Try not to overeat or drink excessive alcohol over the holidays. End your evening (merriment) early to avoid over-fatigue and stress.
- 4. Keep a sense of humor.** Share your love with your family and friends by attending that special social event or a group support outing. Bring your smile, along with some jokes and amusing stories.

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Conclusion

The holidays and social events can be fun, even for people with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue and multiple chemical sensitivity. Decide which social functions you can realistically attend without increasing your pain, fatigue, environmental exposure or stress. After the social outing, remember to take some quiet time for yourself and destress!

Reference

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Allergy-free, Easy Holiday Foods

Nancy Bradshaw, Community-Outreach Coordinator



As the winter holidays roll around, people with food allergies, intolerances and sensitivities can feel left out of the festivities. Others with CFS/ME or FM may be too exhausted to prepare holiday goodies and meals-not to mention the shopping!

To make the holidays more enjoyable, here are a few tips and recipes to make the most of the holiday celebrations.

1. Tell your host about all food allergies, intolerances or sensitivities that you have. Share favourite recipes with the host, if they are agreeable-or bring your favourite to a pot luck.

2. Prepare holiday foods in advance and freeze them. Take your time and prepare food when your energy level is at its highest.

3. If you don't have the energy to prepare holiday snacks or meals-purchase ready-made foods. When possible, choose ready-made foods that are certified as organic, and/or do not contain artificial flavourings, colourings or preservatives. Check the ingredient list carefully, even if the food is labelled gluten-free or dairy-free.

4. Watch for "hidden" ingredients in prepared foods. Always read labels, and ask the person who prepared the food what ingredients are in the dish-especially if you have severe food allergies, sensitivities or intolerances. Here are some hidden ingredients in common holiday foods:

a. Cranberry sauce: *pecans, wheat*

b. Gravy: *peanut butter, soy, Worcestershire sauce (fish)*


c. Mashed potato: *cheese, cream cheese*

d. Stuffing: *almond, crab, oysters, shrimp*

e. Sweet potato casserole: *eggs, milk, pecans, walnuts*

Talking Turkey

Organic, free-range turkey is the best choice, especially for people with food or environmental sensitivities. Organic turkeys are free-range, hormone and antibiotic-free, fed organic meal and slaughtered in a humane

fashion, among other requirements. Look at the label  to make sure that your "organic" turkey is truly organic. , K kosher turkey may be a good alternative to organic. Humane

slaughtering methods are used under a Rabbi's supervision. If cooking kosher turkey, don't add salt as kosher fowl has been treated with salt and water, then thoroughly rinsed.

If organic or kosher turkey is not available or is too costly, **avoid turkeys that have been injected or pre-basted** with "butter" or anything else as they may contain gluten, dairy or other unwanted ingredients.

Tips for roasting turkey-no basting required:

- Place thawed or fresh turkey in the roasting pan on wire rack breast side down.
- Cook with no lid on the roasting pan for approximately 2 hours or until the bottom of the turkey is starting to turn golden.
- Using turkey lifters or implements of choice lift turkey and flip over so that it is breast side up. Continue cooking (uncovered) until appropriate temperature, as per meat thermometer.
- The temperature will continue to rise 5 to 10 degrees after the turkey is removed from the oven.
- The final temperature of the bird, after "resting" for 15 to 20 minutes, should be at least, but not much more than 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Recipes

Gluten-free, Wheat-free Gravy

Serves 6-8

3 tablespoons (cornstarch or arrowroot)

1/2 cup cold water

3 cups gluten-free chicken stock + turkey drippings and giblet stock, if available

Salt and pepper, to taste

1. Combine cornstarch or arrowroot with 1/2 cup cold water and blend until smooth.
2. Over medium heat, add cornstarch mixture to 3 cups chicken stock and turkey drippings and giblet stock, if using. Whisk constantly for about 5 minutes. Mixture will thicken. When it begins to bubble, cook it at low simmer for 3 additional minutes until gravy reaches desired consistency.
3. Add chopped giblets, if using. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Marinated Carrot Sticks

(Or any tolerated vegetable-preferably organic)

Six – eight servings

Serve marinated carrot sticks, baby carrots, green or yellow beans, cherry tomatoes, broccoli flowerettes or other bite-sized vegetable as an appetizer, side dish or as part of a vegetarian antipasto. They may be kept in the fridge for 2-3 days and make a no-fuss, healthy snack.

8-10 organic carrots-cut into sticks approximately 2 1/2 inches (6.5 cm) long by 1/2 inch (1 cm) thick, or 1 pound (454 gm) bag of organic baby carrots or organic pre-cut carrot sticks (make sure that there are no sulphites used to preserve pre-cut vegetables)

1/3 cup (85 ml.) red wine vinegar or fermented alternative

1/4 cup (60 ml.) extra virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon (2 ml) crushed garlic

Generous pinch of salt (preferably iodized sea salt)

1. Place about one inch (2.5 cm) of filtered cold water into a large saucepan and bring to a boil.
2. Add the carrots, cover, and cook for 6-8 minutes over medium heat or until tender-crisp. Drain and transfer to a bowl.

- Combine the remaining ingredients in an empty glass jar a lid and shake until blended-or blend in a blender or food processor.
- Pour the dressing over the carrots and toss or mix until evenly coated.
- Cover tightly and refrigerate overnight-preferably in a glass bowl or container.
- Before serving, bring to room temperature. Drain, or serve with a slotted spoon.

Spiced Figs with Honey and Orange

Serves 6

1 7/8 cup (450 ml) orange juice

1/3 cup clear honey

1/4 cup raw sugar

1 small orange (not peeled)

8 whole cloves

1 pound (450 g) fresh figs

1 cinnamon stick

Mint springs or bay leaves to decorate

- Stud the orange with the cloves. Do not peel the orange.
- Put the orange juice, honey and sugar in a heavy-based saucepan and heat gently. Stir occasionally until the sugar has dissolved into syrup.
- Add the studded orange, the figs and the cinnamon stick to the syrup in the saucepan. Cover and simmer very gently until the figs have softened.
- Transfer to a serving dish and leave to cool. Decorate with mint springs or bay leaves, if desired.

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Relaxation techniques can be useful in dealing with stress, as well as other symptoms related to chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and chemical sensitivities. Some popular techniques that I have found to be useful are mindfulness based stress reduction breathing exercises, meditation and visualization.

Stress

Stress is known to have an effect on all body systems. Some effects of stress are sleep problems, headaches, anxiety, neck or back pain and reduced energy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Increased stress levels can affect your physical and mental health (Larzelere & Jones, 2008).

Relaxation

Relaxation can help release some of the tensions of day-to-day life. You can start by finding a place that is suitable for you- more like a positive space where you can unwind. Light scent-free candles or play some relaxing music to help you prepare for whatever relaxation method that you plan to use. Now, close your eyes-try to recall something that makes you happy. How do you feel now?

Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR)

MBSR is a method that helps you be more mindful, and become aware of what is happening around and within you. It can make you aware of your feelings, thoughts and your body. When you become calm emotionally, you can sense the feedback from your body in response to your thoughts and actions (St. Joseph's Health Center, 2008). You can see things clearly, which gives more power in your personal life. MBSR can involve some relaxation methods such as breathing exercises, meditation or visualization. Improvement in sleep and anxiety are some proven results of MBSR (Winbush, Gross, & Kreitzer, 2007).

Breathing exercises

The way you breathe can have an effect on how you feel overall. You may tend to hold your breath when you are in pain, or after you breathe too quickly. Breathing the correct way can help with feelings of pins and needles, tension and anxiety (Caudill, 1995, pg.42 – 44).

Here are some tips for breathing:

- Make sure you are sitting or lying down comfortably.
- Become aware of your breathing. Place one hand on the upper chest and the other on your abdomen.
- Slowly breathe out then breathe in. Repeat this again and again
- Make sure you exhale longer than you inhale.

Try this deep breathing for five minutes a day and notice the difference.

Meditation

Meditation is an inner state of relaxed awareness and deeper consciousness. This helps in keeping your mind at peace. It is hard to do with our busy lives; however, these self-care methods can create a balance and help in growth and healing. Research has shown that people who meditate regularly have improved lung capacity (Vestergaard-Poulsen et al., 2009). Mindfulness meditation can reduce stress, increase relaxation and promote positive mood states (Shapiro et al, 2007). For example, the pop star Tina Turner used meditation to draw inner strength to leave her abusive relationship. She sang about this in her song 'What's love got to do with it'.

Some tips for meditation beginners:

- Read a book on meditation or listen to instructional videos for motivation.
- Set aside a time of the day for meditation.
- Try to look 'inward' and pay attention to your body.
- Focus on your thoughts and be engaged with it.
- Try to avoid any disturbances.

Stress Management and Relaxation

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Visualization

Visualization is also called guided imagery. Personal thoughts and wishes have been shown to affect our healing, motivation, success and happiness. Through imagination, you can guide your thoughts in a positive direction to achieve a better state of mind. In this method – visuals, music or scripts are used to motivate positive thoughts. Some examples are pictures of beautiful beaches, sceneries or peaceful music. Research has proved that this reduces the effects of anxiety, and improves task performance and memory retention (Hudetz & Reddy, 2004).

Conclusion

Your health will improve if you participate in a relaxation activity that suits your needs and lifestyle. You can do these at home or attend group relaxation sessions where you can meet people and share information on health and coping tips. Doing one of these relaxation techniques or a combination of these, with the advice of a physician, can help in the healing journey towards a better you.

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WHAT'S ON!

Myalgic Encephalitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Conference

Great News! This is our chance to be involved with a fantastic international conference for ME/CFS in Ottawa 2011. The conference is tentatively scheduled for June 23-26, 2011. The conference consists of a 4-day professional meeting and a 1-day (overlapping) patient meeting. It is anticipated that this event will be accredited for continuing medical education.

Green, Fragrance-free Guidelines and Resources

Nancy Bradshaw is developing new fragrance-free guidelines and resources for hospitals, along with Dr. Lynn Marshall and other members of the Canadian Coalition of Green Healthcare. University of Toronto medical student, Ashley Clausner is working with Nancy Bradshaw, and Drs. Riina Bray and Lynn Marshall, on a study designed to enhance access to hospital care for people with environmental sensitivities.

Schools

Nancy Bradshaw is working with Dr. Riina Bray and Karen Robinson, of Canadians for A Safe Learning Environment (CASLE), to develop Guidelines for Students and Staff with Environmental Sensitivities in schools. The guide will be distributed to schools in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and hopefully across Canada, next year.

Updating Information from the 1999/2000EHC Survey and 2005 Canadian Consumer Health Survey

Drs. Riina Bray and Kathleen Kerr, and Nancy Bradshaw are working with a University of Toronto medical student, Andrea Chan on a study developed to assess the current healthcare needs of a cross-section of EHC patients diagnosed with environmental sensitivities, fibromyalgia and/or chronic fatigue. The purpose of this study is to identify service-related gaps that will assist with the planning, development, and implementation of Environmental Health Clinic programs.



May the Joy and Peace of Christmas be with you now and throughout the New Year!

The Environmental Health Clinic

The Environmental Health Clinic (EHC) at the

Women's College Hospital is located on the Burton Hall, Room 518, 60 Grosvenor Street. Toronto, ON

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You may also visit our Web page under www.womenshealthmatters.ca Please feel free to call or write us for a copy of our Clinic brochure.



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