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Newsletter



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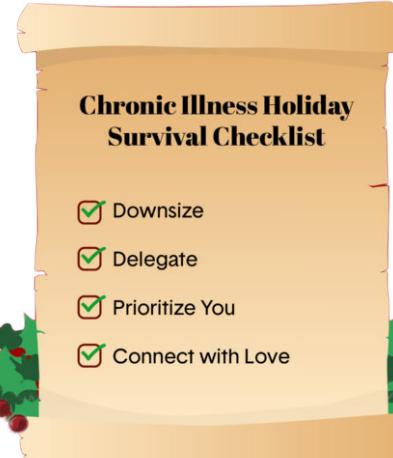


WHAT THE PANDEMIC CAN TEACH US ABOUT HAVING AN EASIER HOLIDAY SEASON WITH RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Source: Lene Anderson (CreakyJoints) – 12/01/21

Although recreating festive traditions in exactly the way we used to may feel like a way to reclaim our lives, it just perpetuates old and dysfunctional habits. Instead, follow these tips for easier and happier holidays, says advocate Lene Andersen.

Ahh, the holidays. I love everything about this season — the lights, the smell of pine, the food, the fact that everyone seems just a little bit more cheerful, and of course the love. This time of year is important to many different cultures and whatever the reason, celebrations are about bringing your family together to celebrate love, light in the winter darkness, and joy. The exuberance and — let's face it — overindulgence is wonderful, but it's also a lot of work.



Which is why those of us who share our lives with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or other chronic illnesses that cause pain and fatigue may dread the coming festive season more than just a little. Regardless of our best intentions, being flattened by a flare during or right after the holidays tends to be just as much of a tradition as the candles and the gifts. But it doesn't have to be that way.

My book [Chronic Christmas: Surviving the Holidays with Chronic Illness](#) is a collection of tips to get you through the holidays. These tips can be adapted to any festive event, be it Hanukkah, Diwali, the winter solstice or even the made-up holiday [Festivus](#) from the sitcom *Seinfeld*.

Even though I've been trying to follow these tips for years, I realized that the pandemic has made me appreciate and apply them in new ways. This advice isn't just about how to "survive" the holidays with RA or chronic illness, but how to enjoy them more fully.

Continued on page 2 & 6

MEDICAL PARTNERS
of AWISH - Rheumatologists: Dr. Elizabeth Hazel | Dr. Mary-Ann Fitzcharles

Dr. Marie Hudson | Dr. Michael Starr

WHAT THE PANDEMIC CAN TEACH US ABOUT HAVING AN EASIER HOLIDAY SEASON WITH RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Source: Lene Anderson (CreakyJoints) – 12/01/21

Tip 1: Downsize

After [...] COVID-19 lockdown changed the way we spent the holidays, we've all learned how to downsize celebrations. [...] Festive season 2020 was a hard lesson, but also a valuable one. Like me, you probably discovered that a lot of the usual holiday excess turned out to actually not be essential. In my family, we missed the traditional dinner (also known as "the best meal of the year"), gathering around the tree and singing Christmas carols, but we also discovered that none of it was absolutely necessary. As we celebrated a shortened and stripped-down Christmas shivering on a Toronto playground, we had everything we really needed: each other.

If you spend some time thinking about what [2020] celebrations looked like for you and yours, [you've been] able to identify what is essential and what may not be. Chances are that list includes people you love, hug, and very little else. If you realize that the holiday meal was surprisingly optional, ordering in may be an option. Of course, we have all learned just how valuable and time-saving online shopping is. [...]

Tip 2: Delegate

Feelings of guilt and frustration over all the things you can't do because of RA is a common experience in our community. It gets worse around the holidays when there is the usual pile of things to do plus 739 other tasks to make the celebration special for the people we love. But why do *you* have to do it all?

Delegating or dividing tasks and responsibilities among the people who take part in a particular event is a beautiful concept. Using a team approach to re-creating special traditions means you might actually get to enjoy it without the extra pain and fatigue. But more than that, it creates a new type of magic. [...] So why not make the big holiday meal a potluck, start alternating who hosts, share the gift shopping lists, and make cleaning up before and after the event a team effort?

Tip 3: Prioritize You

You may have agreed so far, at least in theory, but this is the point when I can almost hear you state a bunch of reasons why these strategies will ruin the celebration. If this sounds familiar, I suggest in the gentlest possible way that you take a deep breath and get a grip. RA often comes with lower energy levels and stamina.

If you don't take control of the holiday plan, RA will take control of you. Remember: Prioritizing your needs is not a selfish act that takes away from others. It is an essential action that helps you give more to others.

Instead of overdoing everything, which will likely leave you on the couch for days to recover, doing less every day helps you avoid the interruption of a flare and therefore do more of what you want (or need) to do for the people you care about. What's important is to create the kind of memories that include your being part of them, rather than being too busy or too tired to participate.

Continued on page 6

COMMUNITY OUTREACH – AWISH PRESENTATIONS & INFORMATION BOOTH

Either at a public event or a private gathering – contact AWISH to learn more about what we do!

Email arthritis@awishmontreal.org and please put Subject as "Community Outreach"

COMMUNITY INFORMATION DAY – ARTHRITIS RENDEZ-VOUS 2025

"The speakers were complementary to each other; all were equally valuable."

"I have been hearing many comments about how successful this years' attendance and the various speakers who were very interesting indeed."



- 18 corporate & local community organizations had information kiosks
- 4 guest speakers (arthritis related topics) - each followed by a Q&A session
Dr. Marie Huson, Dr. Elizabeth Hazel, Dr. Michael Starr & Chloe Guan
- Private booths: Ask-a-Doctor (Dr. M. Hudson) & Ask-a-Pharmacist (Jason Fiore)
- Numerous door prizes • Refreshments and cold buffet

Thank you Provigo Kirkland & Homer's Donuts (Sherbrooke) for donating food to this event!



"Learned about organizations I didn't know existed! Fantastic to have the Ask the Doctor booth. Very helpful."

Youth & Young Adults with Arthritis Program

AWISH is planning a future program –if you are interested, please contact us!



Many people mistakenly think arthritis is just a disease of the elderly, but the statistics tell a different story. About three in 1,000 Canadian children have juvenile arthritis (JA), which makes it more common than most chronic childhood diseases. *Source: [Arthritis Society of Canada](#)*

Arthritis is a collection of chronic diseases that impact your joints and other connective tissues. These conditions are most commonly characterized by swelling, joint pain, and stiffness. There are [more than 100 conditions](#) under the arthritis umbrella, but the most common forms are osteoarthritis (OA) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA). *Source: [American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine](#)*

We envision a community where anyone – of any age - dealing with any form of arthritis can access information and be supported through various services aimed at education & improving quality of life.

If you or someone you know is impacted by arthritis and would like to be kept informed on the progress of our new program and future services offered by AWISH aimed at a younger generation
- or if you'd like to offer a skill or a service to this new group - contact us today!

AWISH will partner with other professionals in the field of arthritis as well.

For more information on programs & activities by AWISH, please contact us

www.awishmontreal.org | 514-631-3288 | arthritis@awishmontreal.org

Arthritis West Island Self Help Association

SEASONAL CALENDAR - WINTER 2026



For more information on programs & activities by AWISH, please contact us

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EXERCISE CLASSES - pre-registration is required



DORVAL

Sarto-Desnoyers Community Centre - 1335 Chem. Bord-du-Lac-Lakeshore

WEDNESDAY - MORNING

10:30 am – 12:00 pm

January 7, 14, 21, 28 + February 4, 11, 18, 25 + March 4, 11

10 weeks | \$70 AWISH member | \$80 non-member

WEDNESDAY - AFTERNOON

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

DDO

Banquet Hall - DDO Civic Centre - 12001 Blvd de Salaberry

WEDNESDAY

11:30 am – 12:55 pm



January 21, 28

February 4, 11, 18, 25

March 4, 11, 18, 25

10 weeks | \$70 AWISH member | \$80 non-member



PIERREFONDS

Gerry-Robertson Community Centre - 9665 Blvd Gouin Ouest

TUESDAY

10:30 am – 12:00 pm

January 20, 27

February 3, 10, 17, 24

March 3, 10, 17, 26*

* NOTE:
March 26th is a
THURSDAY



THURSDAY

10:30 am – 12:00 pm

January 15, 22, 29

February 5, 12, 19, 26

March 5, 12, 19



10 weeks | \$70 AWISH member | \$80 non-member

Led by certified, professional fitness instructors. Well designed to meet individual needs and abilities. Joint and muscle-friendly whole-body exercises, including resistance, aerobics and stretching.



Some services are free for AWISH members, others may require a small fee. **Full session payment is required - no exceptions - prior to start date.** Contact us for cancellation policy, to register & for more information.



AWISH ANNUAL HOLIDAY EVENT - Sunday December 14 at 12pm

of spaces limited / pay-your-own restaurant meal / door prizes

Contact AWISH by Dec 4th to reserve your spot & for restaurant location



SOCIAL BRUNCHES are held every 3rd Sunday of each month. Contact the office for more information. We hope you'll join us for a good (pay-your-own) meal & conversations!

Visit www.awishmontreal.org & follow our [Facebook Page](#) to stay up to date on events & services!

A NEW SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH FOR TREATING CHRONIC PAIN

*Source: Translated from Le Journal de Montréal, August 4 2025
Richard Béliveau (Doctor of Biochemistry – Special Collaboration)*

The genetic study of a boy who is unable to feel pain has identified a protein that could be used to develop a new generation of analgesics for chronic pain.

From a physiological perspective, pain can be considered an alarm signal intended to preserve the body's integrity. For example, if your hand encounters a hot object, the sensory nerves present in this region will generate a nerve impulse that will first be routed to the spinal cord, then transmitted to the brain regions specialized in processing this information. Alerted by this message, the brain in turn sends a nerve impulse that travels back along the spinal cord, reaching the muscles controlling hand movements to move it away from the source of pain. This entire process is completed in a fraction of a second, making it possible to quickly put an end to a situation that could lead to serious injury if it persisted.

ABSENCE OF PAIN

This protective system, essential for survival, is, however, defective in certain neurological disorders such as congenital insensitivity to pain. As its name suggests, individuals affected by this very rare genetic disease (about one in a million) can correctly perceive all physical sensations (touch, pressure), but are nevertheless, from birth, completely insensitive to painful stimuli. In the absence of this protective signal, these individuals are therefore constantly at risk of injuries (bites, burns, fractures) which, if left untreated, can cause disabilities or even serious, life-threatening infections. The molecular mechanisms involved remain poorly understood, but mutations in several genes essential for the sensation of pain have been identified, the best characterized being the one that prevents the production of a protein (called Nav1.7) in sensory nerves, thereby blocking the transmission of pain nerve impulses.



NEW GENE

According to new results obtained by a team of brilliant researchers at the University of Calgary, another protein, called USP5, could also play an important role in transmitting pain signals (1). In this study, the researchers analyzed in detail the entire genome of a child who died suddenly at the age of 16 and who had been completely insensitive to pain since birth.

This analysis revealed a unique mutation in a gene encoding the protein USP5, an enzyme (deubiquitinase) known to control the activity of an ion channel (Cav3.2) that transports calcium into sensory neurons and is involved in nerve impulses associated with pain. Since this channel is 99% identical to the one found in mice, they created an equivalent mutation in these animals using the CRISPR editing tool, a revolutionary technology (winner of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry) that allows for very precise modification of the sequence of any DNA.

They then observed that mice with a mutated USP5 protein were less efficient at detecting acute pain than normal mice and that they had also developed resistance to inflammatory and chronic pain.

CHRONIC PAIN

These results suggest that the USP5 protein could be an interesting target for the development of a new type of analgesic. This is particularly important in the context of chronic pain: it should be remembered that approximately 20% of the Canadian population is affected by persistent pain that disrupts daily activities and significantly reduces quality of life. This is a serious problem because these pains are often resistant to currently available analgesics, while those with a stronger pain-relieving effect, such as opiates, can create addiction problems. Another important step in pain research has thus been taken.

⁽¹⁾ Antunes FTT et al. A pathological missense mutation in the deubiquitinase USP5 leads to insensitivity to pain. *J. Exp. Med.* 2025; 222: e20241877.



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WORDS OF WISDOM

Source: Stevie Wonder, quoted from BBC podcast
Sidetracked with Stevie Wonder (Annie Macmanus)

"As long as you let your mind work, you don't need to retire"



Continued from page 1 & 2

Source: Lene Anderson
(CreakyJoints) – 12/01/21

WHAT THE PANDEMIC CAN TEACH US ABOUT HAVING AN EASIER HOLIDAY SEASON WITH RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Tip 4: Connect with Love

As the Grinch discovers in my favourite Christmas animated show, Christmas (or any celebration) doesn't come from a store. Holiday celebrations are about bringing people together to share love and laughter and light. Making this the guiding principle in your holiday plans can be the first step to dismantling traditions that don't work and unreasonable expectations — from both your family and yourself. Truth be told, these are more often contributors to the exhaustion we try to avoid and the annual fights at the dinner table.

Instead, taking radical action to create a better holiday in the future can be one of the few silver linings of having lived through a pandemic. Although recreating the festive occasion in exactly the way we used to have it may feel as a way to reclaim our lives, it just perpetuates old and dysfunctional habits. Now more than ever before, we know that nothing matters as much as the people we love.

Connecting to that love, finding ways to share it with your family and your community allows space for us to heal and find ways to have a better, safer, and more inclusive holiday. This year let's all celebrate that we are here, while remembering the past and making the future even more special and enjoyable.



MANY THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

It is with their continued support that AWISH is able to better serve the community.

The Dr. J. David & Doris Roger Family Fund



DORVAL



Leah Schwartz estate



Pointe Claire

ÉPHARMAPRIX
Jardins Dorval Gardens

*Agence de la santé
et des services sociaux
de Montréal*

Québec



Membres d'AWISH | AWISH Members



Railroaders
in the community



ACDPN
African Canadian Development
and Prevention Network



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AWISH Information - Education - Support