How to Say ‘No’ to Social Obligations

by BARBARA LEECH

Lupus and Saying No

As a lupus warrior, I am either poised for battle or entrenched in fighting one. The coming holiday season will be a challenge for me in many ways this year. I am in a bad flare and my pain level lately makes it impossible to enjoy anything or even pretend to be social.

I have lost 20 pounds and feel so exhausted I could cry. My rheumatologist told me last week that my lupus is progressing and I must increase my dose of medication to try and hold it at bay.

My mother passed away a few weeks ago, following six weeks of my being in a frenzy to get to her house to care for her, get home in time to put my kids to bed, try and sleep a few hours and get up the next day and do it all again — while bringing my work with me.

Her passing brought some peace but the loss is unbearable. Suddenly, there is nothing more I can do.

So now, the approaching holidays seem like something I must endure this year. I am lost in grief and in a funk. But there is a blessing to this state of mind I find myself in.

Suddenly, I am not afraid to say no. With lupus, I have always struggled with those social obligations where everyone is expecting me to be attending a different festivity every single night from December 15 through January 2.

This year, I am in such a low place in my heart and in so much physical pain, I actually don’t care if I make anyone annoyed or angry by turning down their invitation.

I invite you to share a bit of my angst (or courage), and when you feel a holiday activity is just too much for you to take on, say you are sorry but you simply cannot attend. Heck, with the mood I am in I might not even give an explanation. (But knowing me, I will.)

Be Firm, But Polite

Here are a few good ways to just say no to all the holiday chaos and social obligations:

- “Due to health issues with my lupus, I am hoping to keep the holidays very low-key this year. Focusing on what is important at Christmas is the right thing to do, don’t you think?”
- “Maybe we can attend one or two family activities, we will see, but we simply cannot commit to everything this year.”
- “I am playing our entire holiday schedule ‘by ear’ this year. One day at a time. If it works out, great. If not, we send our love and hope you understand.”
- “The holidays can take a lot out of me. I need to focus on improving my health, not increasing my

challenges. At the moment I am dealing with just about all I can take.”

I realize that no matter how polite I word my explanation, there may be talk behind my back about how I chose not to attend something. This year, however, I choose me.

I encourage you to do the same. If they love you, they will understand. If they don’t understand...well, that says a lot about them and whether you should value what they think in the first place.