

Breathing Easy: Making the Holidays Joyful and Safe with COPD

The holiday season is here! This is a wonderful time filled with warmth, connection, and good cheer. While managing Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) can sometimes add a layer of complexity to celebrations, a little planning and a positive mindset are all you need to ensure this season is your best one yet.

Here are a few tips to help you celebrate safely and joyfully, keeping your breath easy and your spirits bright.

1. Plan for Peace, Not Panic

The biggest key to enjoying the holidays is pacing yourself. Don't feel obligated to do everything or attend every party.

- **Prioritize Events:** Look at your calendar and decide what truly matters to you. Is it the quiet dinner with your grandkids, or the large office party? Focus your energy on the events that bring you the most joy, and feel free to politely decline the rest.
- **Schedule Rest Stops:** If you are hosting or attending a long event, schedule a 15-minute period to step away, sit down in a quiet room, and simply practice your breathing techniques. This isn't just a break—it's essential maintenance.
- **Delegate Tasks:** Hosting? Don't be a superhero! Ask family members to bring dishes, set the table, or clean up. Accepting help saves your valuable energy for socializing and enjoying the moment.

2. Keep the Air Clear and Kind

Holiday decorations and traditions can sometimes introduce hidden irritants. Be proactive about controlling your environment.

- **Scent Check:** Strong smells are major COPD triggers. Kindly ask friends and family to skip the heavily scented perfumes, air fresheners, or highly fragranced candles when you are around.
- **Beware of Smoke:** Avoid open fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, or rooms full of heavy cooking smoke, which can trigger flare-ups. If a relative insists on lighting a fire, find a comfortable seat in another room or keep a safe distance.
- **Watch the Weather:** Cold air can cause airways to tighten. If you go outside, cover your nose and mouth with a scarf to warm the air before it reaches your lungs. Don't let cold weather stop you, just dress smart!

- **Stay Hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water (unless your doctor advises otherwise) keeps mucus thin and easier to clear, which is crucial during the dry winter months.

3. Eating Well, Breathing Better

Eating a large meal can put pressure on your diaphragm, making breathing difficult. A few small adjustments can make a big difference in comfort.

- **Eat Small, Eat Often:** Instead of one large feast, eat smaller amounts throughout the day. This keeps your energy up without overloading your system.
- **Chew Slowly:** Rushing your food can make you swallow air, leading to bloating and diaphragm pressure. Take your time and enjoy every bite.
- **Skip the Gas-Producers:** Foods like beans, broccoli, and carbonated sodas can cause uncomfortable gas and bloating. Choose less gas-producing options like lean proteins and simple starches to keep your belly happy and your lungs free to move.

4. Your COPD Holiday Checklist

Before you leave the house for a celebration, run through this quick checklist:

- **Meds, Check!** Keep your quick-relief inhaler in your pocket or purse. Don't rely on being able to go back for it.
- **O2 Supply:** If you use supplemental oxygen, ensure your tanks or batteries are fully charged and you have enough supply for the duration of the visit, plus a little extra for safety.
- **Emergency Contact:** Make sure your host or a trusted family member knows your action plan and who to call if you experience breathing difficulty.

The holidays are about connecting with loved ones and cherishing special moments. By planning ahead and listening to your body, you can focus on the joy of the season, knowing you've taken every step to keep yourself safe and well.

Happy Holidays!