Surviving (and Enjoying) Events With Migraine

by BARBARA LEECH

Getting Through Big Events With Migraine

My daughter's wedding is set for this summer. Since they set the date, my health and migraines have cast a shadow of worry about how I will handle all the celebratory chaos leading up to it. I want to be in a blissful planning mode, like other mothers, but I am afraid of what may happen if a migraine strikes me down on that amazing day.

What if I am in so much pain I cannot get out of bed, or if I do, I am dragging myself around in agony and barely able to think, speak — or even worse, what if I am also throwing up?

I can try and push through — I have done it before — but what if people look at me and just know? Some mother-of-the-bride I will make.

Then there is these months leading up to the big day. I have many extra tasks I have taken on — what if I can't do them?

So far, I have done well in my role as event planner and decorator. I am pacing myself (I have done this before with my other daughter) making things to decorate the ceremony site and am slowly creating the centerpieces. Nothing has taxed my health too much and so far the stress is minimal.

But this spring we will begin having dress alteration appointments, as my daughter is using my old wedding dress and it needs to be sized to her shorter frame. I know I may wear down as I make the hour drive to meet with her and then rush back home in time for the school bus dropping off her younger brothers.

With four kids, two grown and two young, being there for all of them can be a challenge. Preparing for a big wedding just complicates the schedules and takes away my down-time. All of that can lead to a migraine — or several — over the next few months.

Focus on What Matters

I know no matter what happens I will deal with it. But I don't want an amazing celebration to be tainted by my migraines. Most important, I want to be there, fully present; not sick or in horrible pain, but doing all that I want to do to make this day perfect for my daughter and everyone who attends.

I have started to plan my precautions to ward off any major migraine attacks. Some will work, some may not. Here are a few you can borrow, along with my sincere wishes for you that your next big celebration is memorable for all the right reasons, not for a migraine stealing the moment from you.

Nurture Your Body

I am tempted to eat poorly when I am busy or overwhelmed. Don't do it. Eat healthy and drink lots of water.

Take your medications on time, even if it means when you are doing errands. Staying hydrated is vital to keeping migraines at bay. Avoid or limit wine and alcohol (if they are triggers for you) to de-stress from a big day or even to celebrate.

Nitrates found in certain foods, like bacon, sandwich meats and hot dogs, is also a trigger for me, so I avoid processed meats and fast food of any kind.

Next page: pacing yourself, asking for help, avoiding triggers and more.

Pace Yourself

If you have tasks you must do leading up to a big event or celebration, allow as much time as you can to get things accomplished. This may mean making a list of what needs to get done and starting as soon as you can, taking on a manageable amount each week.

Planning it all out and letting go of any stress is very important to getting these tasks done and avoiding triggering a migraine in the process. If something can wait until another day, one where you are not feeling a migraine coming on, then reschedule your plans.

Address Signs of Migraine as They Appear

I am often guilty of not taking my medication at the first sign of a migraine. I have started to be more diligent and have noticed it does make a huge difference.

In the last month, I have stopped two migraines before they fully developed, simply by taking my medication right when I first noticed the symptoms coming on. I am planning on making this effort all the time now that I have seen solid proof it can work for me.

Ask for Help

I am an epic failure at asking for help or delegating. I finally caved in and accepted help and it amazed me how much of a burden it lifted off my shoulders and how awesome the help was.

So, if someone offers to assist you, say yes. Create a small list of tasks others can do to help you and have it handy to give out, so you are ready with a solid list of things they can do and written explanations or directions for them to follow.

Avoid Migraine Triggers

Picking out flowers, perfume worn by sales people, and bright store lights can set off a migraine for me. Limit your contact with your own migraine triggers and maybe try shopping online for some of the needed items.

Allow Yourself to Rest

Even when things are busy and you find guilt creeping into your mind, remember it is OK to take care of yourself on bad days so you are the best you can be on other days. If you have been very busy and you feel it wearing you down, take a day of rest from planning or other activities.

Be Realistic With Yourself

We all picture the "perfect" celebration, be it a wedding or anniversary, family reunion or birthday bash. But

remember, nobody knows what your grand design for the event was.

Whatever you don’t get done will be your secret. This is not the time to pretend migraines are not a factor in your life.

Having plenty of time to plan a big celebration will allow me to pace myself in a way that will hopefully avoid triggering more migraines. But my daughter’s big day is coming, and I hope that in the final days leading up to it I can keep up with all these precautions I have in place to keep migraines at bay.

The best advice I can give to you and myself is to be honest with yourself and others about how much you are capable of doing, and remember what matters most about the gathering or celebration: the people involved.