

## The Holidays and Autism

By Gail Berman

The Holidays and Autism.

Growing up, my family and I celebrated Chanukah, being of the Jewish faith. I have fond memories of this holiday, growing up. My parents decorated the living room of our house very nicely. There were Chanukah-themed, colourful streamers that spanned across the mantel above the fireplace. We exchanged gifts on the first night only, as back then, it was customary to give gifts only once during the holiday. My mother baked very tasty potato pancakes (potato latkes).

Fortunately, I did not have any anxiety around the upcoming Chanukah holiday while growing up. In fact, I was always calm and collected about this.

As an adult on the spectrum, I do not host a holiday dinner for family or friends. I generally do not entertain because I find that I am anxious about the various aspects of preparation and of the entertaining itself. Therefore, from my perspective as someone on the spectrum, I would recommend to our community that one should entertain only if one feels relaxed about it, but not if the reverse is true.

To families, stores, restaurant owners and workers, I would suggest a few things that could make the holiday season sensory-friendly. Live or background music could be played at a medium, rather than loud, volume. Foods with little or no smell while cooking, and light on spice, might be easier for people to handle. Objects could be neither too bright nor too dark in colour. They could also be smooth, not sharp, and neither too hot nor too cold to the touch.

Whichever holiday one observes, one can enjoy in a relaxed and upbeat manner.

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### About the Author

I am on the Autism Spectrum. An optimistic person, for me the glass is HALF-FULL. I enjoy writing, reading, cultural events, and playing tennis.

I was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

