

THE POLAR EXPRESS GUIDE

5 Ways to Get Through the Holidays Without Everything Going Off the Rails 🚂

By Aimee Woods, PT

The holidays ask a lot of your body. More lifting. More standing. More stress. More sugar. More... everything. 🌲

This guide is here to help you **get through the season without everything going off the rails** - especially your back, neck, knees, and nervous system.

You'll find **5 simple habits** that are realistic for real life. You don't have to do them perfectly. Just start with **1-2 habits** and build from there. Small changes add up fast.

HABIT #1: The 5-Minute Morning Routine

Why it matters: During the holidays, you're doing activities outside your normal movement patterns. Prime your body each morning to handle unusual demands safely.

Your 5 movements (up to 1 min each = 5 minutes total):

1. **Cat-Cow** - get your spine moving
2. **Windshield Wipers** - loosen hips and low back
3. **Wall Angels** - open chest and shoulders
4. **Side Stretches** - length through your whole side
5. **Squats** - wake up hips, knees, ankles



💡 **Pro tip:** Do this while scrolling your phone. If you can scroll for 5 minutes, you can do mobility for 5 minutes.

HABIT #2: Protect Your Body During Holiday Activities

Why it matters: Poor body mechanics = pain. Gift wrapping, cooking, traveling, and lifting can impact your body if you're not mindful.

How to protect yourself:

For Lifting:

- Hinge at the hips, let your booty do the work
- Keep heavy objects close to your body at your midline
- Avoid twisting while lifting, move your feet



For Carrying:

- Distribute weight evenly side-to-side
- Hold loads close to your body
- Use a cart or make more trips instead of overloading yourself



For Cooking/Gift Wrapping:

- Set up tasks so you're not hunched forward
- Use a staggered stance or put one foot on a stool
- Take breaks and change positions frequently (set a 20–30 minute reminder if you need to)



💡 **Remember:** Prevention is way easier than recovery.

HABIT #3: Nutrition Tweaks to Reduce Inflammation

Why it matters: Increased sugar = increased inflammation = increased pain. You can still enjoy the holidays AND support your body.

Simple strategies:

- ✅ **Eat fats and proteins first, carbs last** - slows blood sugar absorption 🍗 🍪
- ✅ **Have 1 tbsp vinegar in water before meals** - this can help blunt blood sugar spikes for some people. (Check with your provider if you have reflux or other concerns.)
- ✅ **Walk or do 10 squats after eating** - signals your body to use the sugar instead of just storing it 🚶
- ✅ **Still eat fresh fruits, berries, nuts, and vegetables** - your body needs these vitamins and antioxidants 🍏 🥦 🥬 🍓

💡 **Mindset shift:** It's not "good food" or "bad food" - it's just food. Eat mindfully for your personal goals. Let's not go off the rails.

HABIT #4: 2-Minute Nervous System Reset

Why it matters: Stress = elevated cortisol = sensitized nerves = more pain. Down-regulate your nervous system throughout the day.

Quick reset techniques (choose one):

Option 1: Box Breathing + Shoulder Shrugs

- Breathe in through nose for 4, hold 4, out for 6 through mouth, hold 4
- Shrug shoulders to ears, hold, release with exhale
- Repeat 4-6 cycles



Option 2: Ear Pull While Humming

- Gently pull earlobes down and gently out while humming a low tone 🦻
- Feel the vibration in your chest and head

Option 3: Gentle Tapping

- Tap gently around your face and collarbones.
- Breathe slowly while you tap

💡 **You can do these anywhere:** While driving, at a stoplight, during mindless tasks. No separate time needed.

HABIT #5: Mindset for Joy and Peace

Why it matters: Negative thoughts share brain circuits with pain pathways. Change your thoughts and you can decrease your pain sensitivity.

3 mindset shifts:

✅ **Gratitude** - Even for the busyness. Chaos often means you have people and purpose.

✅ **Boundaries** - Saying no is self-respect, not selfishness. Protect your time, energy, and body.

✅ **Reframe** - Shift from "I HAVE to" → "I GET to." Say it out loud (even if it feels cheesy at first) 😊

💡 **Practice:** Speak positive encouragement to your body. Notice negative thought patterns and actively change them.

★ A quick safety note:

These ideas are general and educational — they're not a substitute for medical care.

If any movement causes sharp, intense, or worsening pain, **stop**, modify, or skip that exercise, and consider getting it checked out by a qualified professional.

🎯 YOUR DAILY CHECKLIST

Print this and check off each habit daily: Aim for 3-5 days/week to start

Habit	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
5-Min Morning Routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protect Body Mechanics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nutrition Tweaks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous System Reset	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mindset Shift	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

💙 NEED MORE HELP?

If you're dealing with persistent pain, stiffness, or mobility issues that aren't resolving on their own, I'd love to help.

I offer **whole-person, integrative physical therapy** - the kind of care that actually listens, digs deeper, and treats you as a human (not just a diagnosis).

I offer FREE 15-minute phone discovery calls

No pressure, no sales pitch — just a real conversation about what you're dealing with and whether I can help.

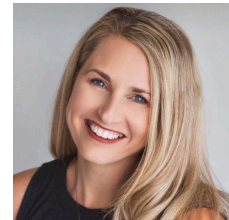
[Click here to book your free discovery call](#)

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Let's make this the season you finally feel good.



❤️ Aimee