Vaxxed Update
Standing Strong Against the Push to Mandate Vaccines

Retroviruses
Agents of change in the development of disease

You’ve got the Diagnosis...
Now What?
Whatever you celebrate, wherever you live, one thing’s for sure: the holiday season is upon us, which means countless parties, presents, and potentially disastrous situations, especially if you’re caring for a child on the autism spectrum. Along with barrels of joy and cheer, this time of year can be terribly stressful—the pressure to decorate the house, buy sufficient gifts for all the right people, and attend event after endless social event.

Throw into the mix the daily stressors of autism, and it’s the perfect storm for an emotional crisis, for child and parent alike. But as with other challenging circumstances, the frenetic pace of the holiday season can be managed—and even enjoyed—with just a little bit of forethought, and a whole lot of love.

What we call “the holiday season” kicks into full swing with Thanksgiving, and offers little time to recover from that singularly demanding meal. Planning for whatever else your family celebrates begins almost immediately: Where will you go? What will you eat? Which ornaments will go on the tree? How should you decorate the house? And finally: Where does your child on the autism spectrum fit into the equation?

But should that dreaded moment arrive—yes, I’m talking about the meltdown or whatever action indicates your child has had enough—make sure there is a quiet room where he or she can take a brief “time out” from the holiday cheer.

Hoping for Happy Holidays?
A little forethought goes a long way in creating warm family memories at this special time of year

DEIRDRE IMUS ...

... is the founder of ImusEnvironmentalHealth.org, a resource for healthy green living, where Deirdre shares tips on how to “green” the way you care for yourself, family and the planet. Everything from the food you eat, the clothes you wear, baby care products, cosmetics, and personal care products, you’ll find practical advice and tips for a healthier lifestyle. Deirdre is a vegetarian for life! Deirdre is also President and Founder of The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center® at Hackensack University Medical Center and Co-Founder/Co-Director of the Imus Cattle Ranch for Kids with Cancer. It is the only vegetarian working cattle ranch for kids with cancer. Deirdre is a New York Times multiple best-selling author and appears weekly on the Imus in the Morning show. The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center® works to ensure children live the healthiest lives possible—today, tomorrow, and decades from now. In her quest to clean up the environment for our kids, Deirdre developed the award-winning Greening The Cleaning® program and product line, which replaces the hazardous ingredients commonly found in cleaning agents with environmentally-responsible, less toxic products wherever possible. The program and products are used throughout the country in schools, healthcare facilities, and businesses.

LET’S BE SENSIBLE ABOUT THIS
The holidays are about nothing if not sensation: smell, sight, hearing, touch,
taste. What is stimulating in a warm and fuzzy way for most of us can be torturous to children with autism. The Autism Site blog offers several “hacks” for getting these kids through Thanksgiving, such as preparing ahead and going over the schedule for the day; preparing the rest of the family for what to expect from your child; designating a safe spot for your child to escape to if he or she feels overwhelmed; and not forcing kids to eat any new or unfamiliar foods. (Who among us would not benefit from these hacks when dealing with extended family in close quarters??)

Prepare your child for new faces by looking through pictures of family and friends prior to attending a party or gathering. Explain who each person is, how they are related, and a fun fact that might help the information stick. Go over the guest roster in the days leading up to the event to reinforce the facts, so your child will feel more comfortable among people who may be strangers.

Don’t hesitate to let friends and family members know about your child’s special dietary needs in advance, or to bring your own food with you to a party. Nobody will be insulted when they discover that avoiding gluten or casein products will keep your ASD child feeling good, and behaving accordingly.

But should that dreaded moment arrive—yes, I’m talking about the meltdown or whatever action indicates your child has had enough—make sure there is a quiet room where he or she can take a brief “time out” from the holiday cheer. Spending copious amounts of time surrounded by family can unhinge the most even-keeled person, to say nothing of how it can affect a child with autism. In their Twelve Tips for getting through the holiday season, The Autism Society recommends not only securing a peaceful space, but also using this as an opportunity to teach your child how to excuse him or herself from the group, a self-management tool that will serve them well as they get older.

If your child does not function at that level, decide in advance on a cue or a word that signals they’d like to retreat to a calmer location. And if your child can’t make this known to you any other way than by acting out, remove him or her from the anxiety-inducing situation immediately, and into a more soothing environment. The Autism Society also suggests this separate space include soft music, low lights, and a bed or chair for your child to relax in.

As with dietary restrictions, let friends and family members know in advance that certain, often unpredictable stressors may send your child into a tailspin, and with little notice. This way when it happens they’ll be less surprised, and less likely to react in a negative way to the sudden change in your child’s demeanor.

**CONSISTENCY COUNTS**

For many people, the holiday season is rife with tradition, and every family has their own special way of doing things. As children with autism tend to be bastions of routine, this special time of year may be initially off-putting to them, as it upsets the daily flow to which they have grown accustomed.

**PICTURE THIS** — Take some time with your child to go through photos of family and friends you may encounter at holiday gatherings.
exciting, and encourage other kids in the family to do the same.

Also, keep your family’s holiday-time activities consistent year-to-year, when possible. Your child will know what food and seating arrangement to expect at Aunt Barbara’s house, and may remember that after dinner is when everybody opens up presents, right before the cookies and milk are served. Although these traditions happen but once a year, you can recall the memories with your child year-round, and build up the excitement as the holiday season approaches.

HEALTH-FRIENDLY HOLIDAY FARE
An important key to survival this time of year is staying healthy, which means not letting temptations get the best of you. The holidays present an opportunity to introduce others to a delicious variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains, which normally play second fiddle but are deserving of praise all their own.

As a vegetarian, I like to turn everyone’s focus to lively grains like quinoa and millet. In addition to being yummy, they’re also gluten-free, so you won’t feel weighed down like you might after eating a bowl of pasta (or a pound of turkey). Toss in some roasted Brussel sprouts, dried cranberries, and toasted walnuts. Await applause.

Tofurkey is a nutritious way for non-meat eaters to stay connected to Thanksgiving tradition. It is comprised of organic tofu, vital wheat gluten, and expeller pressed non-GMO canola oil, and can be served with an equally vegetarian stuffing: think focaccia bread, mushrooms, Herbes de Provence, carrots, onions, and celery.

For toppings, carry the mushroom theme from the stuffing over to the gravy. Use vegetable stock, spices, and a natural thickener like arrowroot or corn starch. Make a healthy homemade cranberry sauce using fresh berries; canned varieties are full of added sugar and possibly also the toxin bisphenol-A (BPA), which leeches into the sauce from the lining of the can.

When cooking any dishes for Thanksgiving or other holidays, be mindful of your ingredients. Buy local: it will be fresher, taste better, and conserve energy (the truck delivering it uses less gas). Avoid genetically modified foods, or GMOs: their original DNA has been purposely altered, and goodness knows how these changes affect human health.

Above all, infuse a hearty portion of holiday cheer into these hectic few weeks. Set aside time to spend with your family, make everyone feel included in traditions, and try to leave the stress behind, if only for a few moments. There truly isn’t any other time of year quite like it, so savor every succulent bite, and every delicious moment.

Note: Information provided herein is not intended to treat or diagnose any health condition. As always, consult your healthcare provider with any questions or health concerns.