Planning and Managing a Road Trip With Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Preparing for Road Trips with RA

Travelling is stressful enough on its own, but add rheumatoid arthritis to the equation and things can seem downright impossible.

However, road trips with RA don't have to be especially challenging if you know exactly what to do and how to prepare for your trip.

Be Kind to Yourself

This may sound silly, but hear me out. Being kind to yourself means not expecting too much of yourself if you are tired or in pain.

If you need to sleep during half of the trip, do it. If you know riding in the car is going to wear you out, don't plan to go out to dinner with friends at your destination when you get there. And if you can't make it to the plans you've made because you're too tired for travelling, don't get angry with yourself. You're doing the best you can.

Don't Take On Too Much Driving

If you're driving in shifts, make sure the other person (or people) know not to ask you to take on too much of the driving. If you feel up to it, by all means, take on as much driving as you feel up to. But if you start to feel sluggish or that your joints are hurting, make sure someone in the car is aware and can take over for you.

Don't push yourself to drive if you're not feeling well, as this can make things worse for you and can potentially be dangerous for yourself, those in the car and others on the road.

Get Comfortable

When I go on long road trips, I am absolutely not above making a nest for myself as a grown up. This is especially helpful for aching hip or shoulder joints.

You can do this by sitting on pillows or placing pillows around yourself. Don't forget to cover up with a blanket if it is cold out. You can even bring a duvet if it is snowing outside or if the cold is extra harsh. If you're not driving, this allows you to doze off, which is especially helpful if you're feeling fatigued.

Remember, though, that even if you cushion your joints with pillows, your seatbelt still needs to be on you properly at all times.

Take Your Medication

Don’t wait for the pain to set in when you’re travelling. Instead, be proactive and take the pain medication before you hit the road. This way, you won’t be sitting in discomfort for a long time waiting for it to kick in.

On the same note, pack your medication where you can easily get to it. If you’re going away for a long trip or with a lot of people, sometimes there is a tendency to pack the car to the hilt, making it difficult to find things in transit. Make sure you know where your medicine is at all times so you avoid this issue.

Make Pit Stops

Pit stops are not only good for RA sufferers, but for everyone’s sanity on long car trips. Plan to stop every couple of hours to stretch your legs and to stretch your joints, ensuring that they don’t become too stiff on the ride.

Each time you stop, make sure you take a walk around the area you’ve stopped in to keep your joints mobile and fluid.

Don’t Burn

Although not all people with RA are sensitive to the sun, some patients notice an increase in issues related to being in the sun. In general, it is a good idea to make sure you’re protected from the sun anyway.

As summer is high time for road trips, take extra precautions to keep your skin protected. Wear sunscreen during the drive and if you can, wear a light colored long-sleeved shirt with the air conditioning on to keep your skin out of the rays.

If you’re sitting next to a window where the sun is coming in directly, you can always purchase a shade to make sure that you’re protected during your ride.

Divide and Conquer

Instead of planning to drive 13 hours straight, even if you’re a passenger request that you divide the trip up. Spend the night at a hotel at the halfway mark to keep from getting too stiff or uncomfortable during the trip. Driving, and even riding, in a car can be exhausting so don’t underestimate this.

Prepare Ahead of Time

Any time you travel, it is a good idea to pack and prepare a few weeks in advance. This way, you won’t be stressed out trying to find everything at the last minute and bring on a flare. Instead, ensure that everything is ready to go a few days in advance so that you can just put your things in the car on the day of.

You’ll also want to prepare by buying and packing snacks and drinks for the journey. This is especially important when taking medication and for keeping up your energy. Consider bringing a cooler along so that everything can be accessed easily and quickly.

Proper Suitcases

On a road trip, you probably aren’t going to be lugging your suitcase around as much, but you never know. Always pack a suitcase with wheels to make it easier on you. Some even suggest that a four-wheeler is the best for those with RA, as it can be pushed next to you instead of dragged.

Ice Packs and Hot Pads

Sitting for long periods of time can be brutal on your hips when you have RA, so consider bringing along a heating pad (like the kind you can purchase at drugstores, which are portable) or packing a few ice packs in your cooler. You can also purchase cooling patches at your drugstore that can offer instant icy relief on your joints.

Above all, make sure you focus on keeping yourself comfortable so that you can enjoy your time away with friends and family.