7 Tips for Pushing Yourself Safely With RA

by ANNA SCANLON

Pushing Yourself Without Going Too Far

When you have RA, it can be really difficult to push yourself to carry on, and usually you should listen to your body and take time out for yourself when you need to.

But sometimes things come up that are simply not to be missed unless you're flaring incredibly badly. Having been caught in some of those situations myself, I'll give you some tips for how to push yourself in these instances, but not so hard that you hurt yourself or your health.

1. Plan Times to Rest

If you know you're going to have a long day, weekend or week, plan ahead times to sleep or rest. This may mean paying a little bit extra for a hotel room near an event or asking a friend or family member if you can nap in a spare bedroom or on a couch in a room that won't be used. Perhaps the last two aren't ideal, but it is better than missing the big event altogether.

As soon as you start to feel worn out, you can always excuse yourself and have a quick nap. I find that these quick naps really keep me going throughout the day, as functioning on little sleep increases my pain tremendously. These naps will keep you chipper throughout the day and in less pain so you can enjoy yourself

2. Leave Early

Even if you take short naps throughout the day, it is also a good idea to leave early so you can get in quality rest. This is particularly important if you are going to an event like a rehearsal dinner the night before a wedding and need to be bright eyed and bushy tailed for the next day.

Although some people who may not know you or your circumstance may end up questioning why you're leaving so soon or disappearing so often, you have to remember that there are only two important things in this situation: your health and being able to attend and enjoy the event. Don't listen to what anyone else has to say.

3. Bring Your Medications

If you're a woman and carry a purse, make sure to load it with your medication in case your pain starts flaring up. You should also make sure to take your medication on a regular schedule to keep your disease in check. Some people with RA recommend taking pain medication throughout the day before there is any pain just to ensure that no pain rears its ugly head.

If you're a man, you can always opt to bring a small briefcase or pouch for your medication or ask to have it stored in a certain place so you know where it is. For example, if you are at a family member's house, you can always ask to store it in their bathroom or kitchen. If your family is taking over a social hall in a church or temple,

you can place it somewhere in the kitchen to ensure you can find it if you need it.

One good way to ensure you take your medication, especially if you're pre-emptively taking pain meds, is to set an alarm on your phone or watch. If you placed your medication somewhere during the function, make sure you set an alarm at the end of the function to ensure that you pick up your meds before you go home. Losing them might put a damper on the entire evening!

4. Create a Little Supply Kit

If you suffer from pain and find that things like heating pads or ice help your joints feel better, you can always carry some of these with you in a little supply kit alongside your meds.

You can purchase heating packs or ice packs that heat up or cool off immediately if they are activated. These can be applied even under a table if you've got knee or ankle problems, or you can keep your hands in your lap if you want to make sure you don't draw attention to your RA. It is, however, up to you if you want people to be aware of it – this is just a tip in case you are embarrassed.

Another thing that sometimes helps me during flares or when I'm ill are popsicles. It sounds weird, but the cold always soothes my jaw or a headache, and makes me feel a little bit more peppy.

5. Boost Your Energy

Although I wouldn't advise using artificial means to boost your energy most of the time, if you are trying to stay awake for one special day and have trouble with fatigue, there are some things you can do. Sometimes I drink Diet Coke to help wake me up and anything with caffeine will do that for you.

Additionally, you can try energy drinks for a temporary boost, but beware that any of these artificial energy boosters can make you crash later. However, it is worth it just for a quick burst.

For a more natural energy surge, you can try bee pollen tablets. I have used these and absolutely love them as they add an extra bit of energy during the day. These, however, cannot be used if you are allergic to bees, so please be wary before using a product like this.

6. Speak to Your Family and Friends

No matter what, there are some people who simply won't understand your RA or why you will have to take time out to rest. But, it is better to attempt to explain your reasoning for having to sleep more or having to take extra medication so that you can give people the chance to understand.

If people are not being understanding, don't let it stress you out, but give it a try beforehand so that everyone is on the same page.

7. Rest

Once your busy day is over, it's time to rest. Try to set aside a few days to recover. Plan ahead, especially if you have to take holiday time off of work, and be sure to get enough rest before getting back to your everyday life. Make sure to be kind to yourself!