Tips for Traveling Aboard With Osteoarthritis

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Tips for Staying Pain-Free While Traveling With Osteoarthritis

Traveling with osteoarthritis (and managing it) can be successful when you organize and pre-plan as much as you're able. Surprises can be a part of any journey, but with OA on your plate, you'll need some tips and tricks to help support you during any unexpected detours.

Try not to let any obstacles stand in your way and keep you from the travel plans you're excited about. Many people simply stop participating in new adventures because of health concerns, without realizing there are many ways to make it work. Bon voyage!

Before You Leave

Before you set off on your trip, find out if the hotel or cruise line has a sauna or hot tub; ask for a room on the first floor or nearest an elevator; request a mini fridge for any medications and bring a favorite pillow or two for your comfort. The more you can put into place before beginning your adventure, the smoother it will feel.

Once your plans are in place, be it for a long weekend in a familiar locale or a two-week European cruise, you can start looking at the parts of the trip that may give you the most trouble and plan accordingly.

For example, my OA gives me the most trouble in my leg, and I battle fatigue during a flare up, so I keep my eyes open for strategies to help with those specific concerns.

Organize Personal Supplies

- **Medications:** be sure you call your doctor and fill all prescriptions a few days before you leave. Designate a carry on bag that can fit your medications, essential oils, heating pads, or portable stim units. Have everything packed and labeled, with a little extra just in case. Ask for a backup prescription from your doctor in case your bag gets lost and keep it with you, not in checked luggage.
- **Mobility Tools:** call ahead and request an ADA room if you're staying in a hotel or on a cruise line. Decide which tools you may want to travel with (like a cane) and which you can rent while you're there (like a mobility scooter). Some hotels provide mobility scooters complimentary or for a nominal fee.
- **Scheduling:** determine the time of day you feel your best and plan your arrival and departure times around that window if at all possible. If you are driving, break up the trip to take breaks and stretch. If you are flying, get dropped off at the gate to take some of the pressure off all the walking and opt for an aisle seat so you can get up and stretch without climbing over people.

On the Road Again

Once you have started your trip, you will want to pay attention to how you feel so you can adjust as needed. Be sure to communicate regularly with your travel partner(s), so they will be in the loop about what you need to have

a successful vacation. Don’t wait until you are exhausted, sore and hungry!

Pacing

If managing OA is new for you, and even if it isn’t, you may get frustrated that you can’t do as much as you used to. Or you may feel disappointed if certain activities are off your list. Try to plan your days to include one “have to” activity, a block of time to rest, and time to gently exercise.

Excursions

Whether you are cruising or looking for day trips to a new place, plan carefully. Try bus tours instead of hiking, do a half day activity instead of a full day, and build in time to gently stretch when you normally would. Wear your most comfortable shoes and supportive braces, and be sure to use a cane or rent a scooter to help keep you feeling in the loop.

Sleep

I’m always tempted on vacation to stay up late and sleep even later. The problem with that is now I manage OA, and a disruption to my sleep schedule can set off a bout of insomnia.

Traveling is exhausting for everyone, and those of us who battle fatigue can get knocked out fast. Try sticking to your regular sleep routine as much as you’re able and grab a nap when you need it to keep your stamina up.

Nutrition

Vacations (especially cruises!) can be a challenging time to stick to a diet. While some flexibility is encouraged, remember that food is fuel. The better you can eat well, the better you will feel. Carry some snacks with you like fruits, nuts and granola bars. Drinking plenty of water will help keep you from feeling sluggish on a long travel day, too.

Recovery

Coming back from a trip can you leave you feeling more worn out than when you started. Build in a day or two when you return to recover from your trip.

Place a grocery order on your way home, so you don’t have to make a run to the grocery store first thing. Give yourself time to throw in a load of laundry and rest from the return trip.

Vacations are a wonderful time to connect with family and friends, not to mention gaining an appreciation for a new culture. Do everything you can to venture out, and if you plan ahead a bit, you’ll have a wonderful time!