
A GUIDE TO MANAGING PAIN

TRAVELLING ABROAD? YOU CAN DO IT



A Pain Concern Leaflet

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Top Travel Tips From Marietta Birkholtz and Louise Aylwin

Friends and family heading for exciting holiday destinations might ask you to come along. They will board a plane without a second thought as to how they manage three, eight or twelve hours sitting. However, if you experience chronic pain, several concerns might cross your mind, for example, 'I will seize up in my seat' or 'I'll need the whole holiday to recover from the flight...'

If travelling has become a lost pleasure, use our Top Travel Tips to help you return to this fabulous pastime. Many people think of travelling as 'one BIG overwhelming chunk'. Our Top Travel Tips will help you to think in SMALL MANAGEABLE STEPS. Always use them in conjunction with airline safety regulations and flight attendance advice. Although we focus on flying, the eighteen hints apply to any form of transport and can help you save energy to enjoy your holiday on arrival.

Before leaving

1. Select an achievable destination Your dream might be New Zealand. What about building up to this trip by doing several shorter ones? Starting with a one-hour flight to London...followed by a three-hour flight to Greece or Majorca...or whatever seems appropriate for you.

2. Plan far in advance when to go Out of season may be best to begin with. This usually means more space in planes at your preferred time of day. Also, flight personnel might have more time to respond to your needs, for example, assistance with your bags and transfers can be arranged more easily.

3. Choose your seat Call your airline to explain briefly about chronic pain and ask for a seat with leg space near the aisle (or try to get placed next to a vacant seat). Effective communication may even get you an upgrade to First Class! Other people book two seats to have more space to move. The seats near the emergency exits have extra space. However, for security reasons airlines may not be able to offer these to people with disabilities and walking aids.

4. Increase your sitting ability to 20-30 minutes This is the recommended maximum sitting time for *anyone*, regardless of health status. After 20 minutes (or less) always try to get up because this can reduce or prevent stiffness and increased pain. You may want to practise on a chair similar to a travel seat (a car seat?). Make gradual, day-by-day increases in sitting part of your daily routine. Regular practice can yield long lasting results.

5. Establish positions you can alternate with sitting For example, standing, lying, walking, squatting and kneeling. All of these can be done on a plane.

6. Practise stretching Use the stretches you know, or contact the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, 14 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4ED.

7. Avoid overdoing things several weeks before departure Perhaps buy all holiday essentials and pack in advance. As the leaving day draws near, you may need a daily plan including more short rests, relaxation and stretches.

8. Communicate your holiday requirements to any travel companions For example, tell them that you might need time to recover from the journey. This can aid realistic planning and prioritising for the first couple of days of the holiday.

On the day of travel

9. Ask for help You may well be able to get to the airport by yourself, but what about conserving your energy on the day of travel? Friends, family, neighbours, taxi drivers and airport personnel are often happy to assist you with carrying items and might accompany you from A to B.

10. Take a small pillow or a rolled-up towel on the plane to support your lower back, legs or feet.

11. Communicate Let your flight attendant (and people next to you) know that you will move around frequently and that you may need a space to lie down and stretch. People have been offered the kitchenette, the aisle and even space in First Class for this purpose.

12. Move around frequently If you feel self-conscious you may want to ask yourself, 'What is more important – my well-being or what others think?' Generally, people are too busy with their own concerns to worry about your movements. Also, many changes of position can be 'hidden' in ordinary actions such as taking your jumper on or off, reaching for your hand luggage, going to the toilet, getting a drink, etc. Use your imagination!

13. Monitor your stress levels Notice your early warning signals and respond promptly with whatever helps you best, for example, listening to music, talking to someone, reading, or breathing more deeply to relax.

On arrival

You are
on holiday!

14. Continue with short regular rests and treat yourself, especially on the first couple of days when you may be tired or a bit flared-up from the travelling. There may be pressure to get started on the 'sights', but you know better and can state your needs. Assertive communication and thinking helpful thoughts are the key.

15. Continue to stretch, relax, rest and change position each day BEFORE tiredness sets in or pain increases. The beach, the pool and the countryside offer endless opportunities for this.

16. Plan activities you are sure you can manage Break them up into small achievable steps, interspersing activity with rest, relaxation and stretches.

17. Beware of the last day Leaving parties and numerous attractive outings can distract you from the need to pack early and rest before going home...Planning and pacing your return journey come in handy here.

18. Celebrate Enjoy, and congratulate yourself on your travel success.

Dream come true

Recently we heard of a former patient who managed a thirteen-hour flight to Mauritius. This was achieved using some of our eighteen travel tips!



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About the authors

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