How to Cope While Driving With Lupus

by BARBARA LEECH

Helpful Tips for Driving With Lupus

Wherever I go, the wolf is with me — that includes driving in my car. With lupus as my copilot, it is not a comfortable ride.

I am currently battling a bad flare. You know the kind; where every single normal task to be complete becomes monumentally harder than anyone can manage. I have ended just about every day this month ready to fall into bed and curl up into a ball of tears.

I have a road trip coming up that I cannot skip, which means driving. My daughter is getting married this weekend — a destination wedding of sorts in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

The drive is only about two hours from my house and we are spending several nights up there, but today, as I attempted to complete a few basic errands, I realized how much effort and pain driving causes me right now.

We are taking up many suitcases, tuxes and dresses, centerpieces, twinkle lights — so two cars will be required for the trip and that means I must drive myself.

Right now it is hard to concentrate on the road while I drive, and I hate feeling like I am not up to the task. But my kidneys are aching and holding my foot on the gas pedal is somehow exhausting. I'm a mess.

But, I am also the mother of the bride, so I must be there, looking presentable wearing a smile — no matter how I feel.

I have a few tactics that I have employed in the past to try and keep the wolf at bay while driving. I plan on using every single one of them to get to my destination this weekend!

Tactics for Driving With Lupus

- **Pack plenty of cold water to stay hydrated.** When I get dehydrated, muscle cramps and aches and pains are felt more intensely. Keeping hydrated also flushes out the body and helps prevent water retention.
- **Eat healthy the day before any big drive and even that day on the road.** Processed foods, salt, sulfates and artificial ingredients can send me into a flare and exacerbate any current lupus attack. It can be hard to eat healthy on the road, but I refuse to get fast food. I either pack food for the drive or I stop at a sandwich shop that serves healthy choices.
- **Have pain medication handy in the car and easily reached without a hassle.**
- **Limit coffee.** This is a hard one for me, but driving and dehydration do not go well together. Plus, it irritates the kidneys. I try to stick with water before and during a long drive.
- **Use cruise control if your car has it.** Holding your leg extended for long periods of time on the gas pedal

can be painful. Learn how to use your cruise control for lengthy highway driving.

- **Bring sunglasses, a scarf, and even a hat if you are sun-sensitive.** You get more UV rays while driving your car than you think. Lupus and sun exposure can cause me to get a rash on my face, blurred vision, and symptoms that sometimes mimic a small stroke.

- **Know your route.** Driving is hard on the body when you have lupus, but the stress of getting lost and the added time trying to find the correct direction will make it much more painful. I use my GPS a lot, but I also pre-write basic turns or directions on sticky notes and stick them on my dashboard for easy reference.
- **Purchase a cushioned seat cover.** These can be found at car detailing stores and can add a little extra comfort when every inch of your driver's seat seems to cause you more pain.
- **Make certain the driver's seat is at the correct height and distance to allow the greatest ease and comfort while driving.**
- **Plan your music to be relaxing or uplifting.** A wandering mind while stuck in traffic or on a boring stretch of highway allows you think about everything your body is feeling. The more you focus on your pain and frustration, the more it will seem to hurt. I plan the music before I start the car and I typically choose something soothing and relaxing to help me release tension.

Short of asking someone else to drive me — which I hate doing — I find that using a few strategies can ease the pain that driving can have on my body. Everything is struggle with lupus, driving is just one more thing warriors must plan for.