Traveling Smart With Lupus: What You Should Know Before You Go

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Traveling with Lupus

For most, travel is an exciting opportunity to experience new sights and sounds, meet new people, and let go of everyday stressors. It's a time for rest, rejuvenation, and turning off your brain.

However, traveling with lupus doesn't change that. Having a chronic illness can add an element of anxiety and fear of, "What if something happens on my trip that will induce a lupus flare?"

It's a scary prospect, especially if you are traveling to another country, but by asking the question, it gives you a chance to prepare and deal with a lupus flare-up. Whether it's travel for pleasure or work, there are several ways you can put yourself in the best position, mentally and physically, before, during, and after you travel.

Scheduling

When scheduling a flight, train or road trip, try to be as cognizant of your sleep or rest needs as possible. For longer trips or international flights, schedule at least a half day or more of transition or rest time when you arrive and when you return home.

Try not to plan too much in one day. It may seem like squeezing in as many activities as possible will make the most of your time abroad, but allowing some flexibility for breaks, if needed, will ensure that you have the energy to last the whole day.

If you are traveling with someone, schedule a time to talk to them about your travel needs, so you can come up with a plan that works for both of you.

If you are away for a conference, be strategic in what you plan to attend and how long. For example, if your energy is low, skip the breakfast keynote and stay in your room for sleep in, but join the after conference mixer for an hour, so you don't miss out on networking opportunities. You can always get updated by a colleague or get a speaker's powerpoint sent to you.

Flying

When booking a flight, inform the airline if you have a wheelchair or other boarding needs. Sometimes information can get lost, so call the airline the day before your flight to ensure that your requests have been noted.

Don't be shy about asking for what you need. If you find that you are sitting by someone who is coughing, ask to be moved.

Accommodations

Before booking an accommodation, take some time to do the following:

- If you have mobility issues, call ahead to ensure that you are staying somewhere that is fully accessible (elevator, ramps, etc.).
- Book something close to transit and the attractions/locations you are going to visit.
- Choose an accommodation that is close to a grocery store and or pharmacy.
- Locate the nearest hospital or urgent care facility and keep the addresses on your phone or written down on a note in your wallet.
- Ask if there is a mini fridge – this comes in handy for medications that need to be refrigerated and to store healthy snacks.
- If you are staying at a hotel, ask if they have room service – this is a great option if you are feeling unwell and are unable to leave the hotel to get something to eat.

What to Pack When Traveling With Lupus

Medical Kit

Bring your essential "just in case" medical items, so you have everything you need in the room you are staying in from Day 1. Make sure you pack these in your carry-on suitcase to avoid any stress caused by lost luggage.

- Prescription medications (in the original bottle if flying) plus an extra few days if travel plans are delayed. Don't forget to refill your prescriptions well in advance before you leave!
- Tylenol / Aspirin for headaches and Gravol for nausea are essentials for a travel medical kit.
- Your favorite essential oil – whether it's lavender to help you sleep or eucalyptus to chase away the sniffles, these oils are helpful and easy to pack.
- Hand sanitizer.
- Medical emergency information:
    - Emergency phone numbers
    - List of medications and allergies
    - Travel insurance information

Note: It's important that you notify your rheumatologist that you are planning to travel. If required, ensure that you are given the necessary vaccinations before traveling with lupus.

Flight Essentials

When flying, the beginning of your journey can be quite cramped and uncomfortable. Pack these flight essentials to make your travels smooth and relaxing from the start:

- Compression socks
- Neck pillow
- Large scarf – can act as a blanket and/or a sleep mask
- Earplugs or earphones
- Dress in layers – the temperature on a plane can fluctuate, so layering prepares you for any scenario!

Pieces of Home

Being away from the comforts of home can be difficult, but even more so when you are feeling under the weather. Be prepared for a little energy day with the following comfort items from home:

- Cozy slippers or socks
- Your favorite pajamas or sweats
- Your favorite tea
- A few tea lights
- Your favorite book

- Download a podcast or relaxing music

Eating Well on the Road

Purchasing food from a grocery store can save you money and keep your energy up while you are traveling with lupus. Knowing you have the option to lounge in your comfy clothes and eat well in your room goes a long way in creating a sense of calm and wellness.

Here are some items that you can pack so that you can eat well on the road:

- Travel cutlery – you never know when you'll need a fork, knife or spoon.
- 1 Tupperware container – the lid and the container can be used as dishes.
- Small amount of dish liquid – you can use a face towel as a dish rag/
- Water bottle with built-in water filter.
- A portable coffee or portable tea mug.
- Protein bars or energy bars.
- Oatmeal packets or make your packets in ziplock bags with a dash of cinnamon.
- Trail mix with or without dried fruit

Preparation is Key

Don’t be afraid to voice your needs, create space for rest, and bring a toolkit of items that will give you options when you aren’t feeling well. With thoughtful preparation, you can lessen your lupus-related fears and embark on your next adventure with confidence!