



TRAVELING TIPS

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“Summertime and the living is easy”... but is it? If you have Parkinson’s disease and you’re going to do some traveling this summer, it may require a little extra planning. I’m writing this article from a personal perspective as my husband and I fluctuate from delightful anticipation to anxious apprehension when thinking of making travel plans. To ease my anxiety, I decided to take the Boy Scouts motto, “Be Prepared” to heart. I hope the following suggestions will be helpful to you as well.

→ **Plan ahead for easy traveling.** Always leave plenty of time to get to each location. Try to coordinate your medication schedule with your travel time. Wear a whistle around your neck in case you find yourself stranded in a bathroom, hallway, elevator, etc.

- ***If you are traveling by air,*** save your energy--a few days before your flight request a wheelchair at the gate and at your destination. If you travel with a wheelchair that is stored with the baggage, ask the airline for a wheelchair on board that fits in their small aisle, so you can use the restroom. The law requires that all airlines leaving from America *must* carry a scooter at no additional charge regardless of weight. Request early seating to get a convenient place. Ask for an aisle seat close to the bathroom. Airlines will accommodate a special diet if you order one eight hours ahead of the flight. Keep flight information and identification easily accessible. Consider taking a sedative prior to the flight to alleviate undue stress.
- ***If you are traveling by water,*** you can eat watch movies, see live shows, gamble, shop and relax as most ships have special rooms designed to handle adults with physical limitations. Just let the cruise line know if you need special assistance.
- ***If you’re driving,*** remember that some medications can make you drowsy, so share the driving time. You will want to drive medicated to avoid muscle stiffness and allow you to get from the car to a restroom.
- ***If you’re traveling by train,*** you can relax and see the countryside without a worry. Amtrak has wheelchair lifts and seats that can be removed to accommodate wheelchairs. Most trains have at least one compartment equipped and reserved for the disabled. Food can be ordered and delivered directly to your compartment if getting to the dining car is too difficult.

→ **Consider taking out travel and health insurance.** You certainly anticipate taking planned trips, but if you are unable to go for some reason or you’re out of the country and you need a doctor or dentist, the cost of the insurance may be worth your peace of mind.

→ **Prearrange your accommodations.** Make sure you have confirmed hotel reservations. You don’t want to have to search for a place to stay after traveling for hours. In addition to non-smoking rooms, some hotels may have special rooms for those with limitations. The rooms are often equipped with larger entrance doors, doorbells, telephones and alarms that use flashing lights rather than ringing (for the hearing impaired.) Everything is lowered to wheelchair height from sinks, to peepholes in the doors, to clothes rods in the closets. Most bathrooms also have wheel-in shower stalls or benches so that you can sit while bathing. Hotels and cruise ships are often quite large, so we always request a room close to the elevator. **If you need a wheelchair or scooter...** most hotels can tell you where to rent one. Although I don’t normally use a wheelchair, we had one delivered to the hotel in Washington because of the long walks from office to office and we rented one at Disney World. You can also arrange with the hotel to have the local taxi

company send a “handicap” taxi which is usually a hi-top ramp equipped van and are available upon request subject to prior commitments.

→ **Pack carefully.** Select mix and match, layered, washable clothing that can be varied with jewelry or scarves and will be suitable to the weather. If you have a handicapped parking permit, take it with you. If you are traveling by air, don’t pack your medications or pack double so you don’t arrive without your medications. If you have to deal with lost luggage it’s easier if you can move. Carry a water flask or bottle so you can take pills wherever you go.

→ **Consider your medications.** Take more medication with you than you think you need. You could lose your pillbox, drop pills on the floor or have a change of plans. You don’t want to get caught short. Carry your medications in their original bottles, with the name of the drug, your own name and that of your doctor on the label, particularly if you are traveling abroad. Another consideration when traveling abroad is you may need to adjust your drug scheduling to a different time zone, which may take a day or more to acclimate and get the full benefits. Schedule your activities to allow your body time to adjust. Another hint: if you are traveling for long periods, you may want to obtain a referral to a Parkinson’s specialist should an emergency arise.

→ **Take time to rest during or after each day’s activities.** Whatever type of trip you take, it helps to take a little mini-vacation to refresh yourself. Allow extra time when making your plans so you won’t feel rushed.

→ **Look for the “easiest” way to do things.** For example, Disney World will send purchases to the front gate for pick-up. Mail packages home rather than carry them.

→ **Consider taking an organized tour for people who are disabled.** A good tour company dedicated to this purpose can take many of the hassles out of traveling.

→ **Check out different travel newsletters.**

Don’t allow Parkinson’s to stop you from traveling; but do invest a little extra time and effort before leaving home in order to make your trip more organized and less stressful. For as we all know, along with less stress come fewer symptoms.

Milton Berle said “laughter is an instant vacation.” So if traveling is not in your plans, listen to “Uncle Miltie” ~ enjoy a good laugh and you can vacation without leaving the comfort of your home.

