



Planes, Trains & Automobiles: Don't Let Pain Derail Your Summer Travel Plans

By Amy Rice, MSPT, Center for Pain Management

The months of June, July and August typically are the least productive for American businesses. Increasingly longer lunches, daydreams of being outside in the sun and planning for the annual family summer vacation rob companies of employee productivity. Workers eagerly check off the days on the calendar waiting for their mid-year week of freedom. In fact, the U.S. Travel Association reports Americans will take 322 million domestic trips this summer.

Despite this, you've waited six months for this vacation, and with summer traveling comes the joy of family togetherness, relaxation, excitement and fond memories. However, back and neck pain should not be one of those memories. So whether you're traveling by plane, train or automobile, be sure to protect your back and neck muscles during the trip to and from your destination. Preparation and mindfulness are key to not letting pain ruin your fun.

Research has shown that the healthy human body can tolerate sitting in one position for only about 20 minutes at a time. Neck and lower back pain are common side effects of sitting in a confined position for periods extending past 20 minutes. This pain is most often caused by poor posture which impedes circulation and deprives the lower back of oxygen.

When traveling by car

Here are five ways to help protect your back and neck while traveling by car:

1. Don't slouch. Sit with your knees level to hips and feet flat on the floor.
2. Use back support, such as a lumbar roll, if your car's seat doesn't have good support.
3. If you are prone to back or neck pain, plan to stop briefly every 30 minutes during prolonged travel to get out of the vehicle and stretch.
4. Prevent undue strain on your neck, such as talking on your cell phone while clenching it between your ear and shoulder. If you must talk on a cell phone in the car, use a hands-free ear piece for comfort and safety.
5. Use arm rests to support your elbows.

When Traveling By Air

Thinking of taking a different travel route this summer? If you are flying, here are steps you can take to help

alleviate pain while sitting in a crowded cabin with compact seats.

- **Stretch.** When it is safe, stand up and stretch. Do a few walks up and down the aisle to get your circulation moving. Try to book an aisle seat to make getting up and down less disruptive to fellow travelers.
- **Support.** Create your own lumbar support: ask a flight attendant for a pillow or rolled blanket to place behind your back. And while they might not be the most stylish accessory, an ergonomically-approved travel neck pillow will do wonders for mitigating a stiff neck.
- **Hydrate.** Water is one of the best ways to keep your body functioning optimally. Be sure to drink plenty of water to give vital nourishment to your muscles.

When you arrive at your destination, wait for crowds around the baggage claim to thin out so you can carefully remove your luggage from the carousel. Remember to lift with your legs and knees, not your lower back. Turn from your legs to move luggage from the carousel or car trunk to the ground. Twisting with the spine while bent forward holding something heavy is a common mechanism of back injury. If your suitcase is too heavy, ask for help. Also consider helping out your back by investing in lightweight luggage with wheels.

Stretching is Key

Whatever your mode of transportation, sitting for a long period of time can cause stiffness in joints and muscles. Stretching has been proven to decrease the risk of injury, so do some simple stretches often to help alleviate and prevent discomfort.

Should You See a Doctor?

To determine if you need to seek professional medical assistance, ask yourself the following:

- Have you been in pain for six months or longer?
- Does the pain radiate into your arms or legs?
- Have you been taking pain-relieving medications (over-the-counter or prescription) every day to help with pain?
- Does your pain limit your daily activities?
- Have you noticed that medications no longer provide relief, or are you experiencing unwanted side effects?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, contact your doctor or the Center for Pain

Management. Physicians with specialized qualifications in pain medicine can help you prevent further injury, assess the severity of your injury and prescribe a treatment plan to help you manage your pain and get back to life.

While enjoying vacation time with your family this summer, be mindful of the strain traveling can put on your body. Thinking ahead can help make your trip more enjoyable, and your back will thank you.

Safe travels!



About the Author

Amy Rice, MSPT, brings more than 15 years experience in the medical industry to her role as administrator of the Center for Pain Management, located in Indianapolis. She is a licensed physical therapist, a Fellow of the American Academy of Pain Management, and holds a master's degree in physical therapy and bachelor degrees in biology and music performance. Amy manages day-to-day operations of the Center's medical practice and surgery center. The Center for Pain Management's team of board-certified pain physicians, psychologists, licensed physical therapists and supporting professional staff offers the most comprehensive, evidence-based diagnostic and treatment programs available to pain patients in Central Indiana. Expert services include a balanced mix of modalities including interventional treatments such as facet, spine or epidural injections or nerve blocks; and spinal cord stimulation, medication management, physical therapy and psychological evaluation. For more information, call 317-706-PAIN, log on to www.indypain.com or e-mail arice@indypain.com.