Preparing for a Road Trip With COPD

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Don't Let COPD Keep You at Home!

You can travel unrestricted with COPD, providing your symptoms are under good control and you take steps to prepare for your journey in advance.

By planning carefully, you will reduce the risks of developing complications while you travel and can enjoy your trip wholeheartedly. Let’s take a look at steps you can take which will help you to relax, stay well, and have a wonderful road trip.

See Your Doctor Before You Travel

Make an appointment to meet with your pulmonologist several weeks before you plan to leave on your trip. When scheduling your appointment, keep in mind that pulmonologists and other medical specialists are often booked up several months ahead of time, and call for an appointment as soon as you decide to travel.

By scheduling your appointment well in advance of your departure date, you will afford yourself with the time needed to have tests and medication adjustments made if necessary. Schedule appointments with any other specialists that provide care for you as well, and plan to see your primary care physician a week or two before you leave.

While meeting with your health care providers before your trip may seem unnecessary if you are feeling well and your symptoms are well controlled, keep in mind that travel, regardless of how delightful it is, does cause physical and mental strain. It is well worth the trouble of seeing your health care providers in advance of your journey so that you will be prepared to meet any challenges that come up while you’re away.

Plan Ahead for Managing Minor Ailments

Learn what your healthcare provider recommends for the treatment of common illnesses you might face while traveling. For example, find out what type of medications you can safely take for treatment of COPD headaches, muscle pains, and gastrointestinal disturbances.

Consider purchasing small sized packages of over-the-counter remedies to take with you. You will likely be able to obtain them at less cost than while on the road, and you will have the medications readily available should the need arise.

Reduce Stress With Advanced Planning

Many people who suffer from COPD struggle with anxiety related to shortness of breath. If you have anxiety, ask your health care provider about medication and other treatments that can be safely used while you travel.

Keep in mind that medications that reduce anxiety may make you drowsy, so if you are taking them you will need someone else to do the driving on your trip. If you are provided with a prescription for a new medication, take it at least one week before you leave, so that you can see how you tolerate it.

Regional Differences Impact COPD Symptoms

Notify your doctor or other health care provider if you are traveling to areas that have extreme temperatures. Changes in temperature and humidity levels may impact your symptoms.

Likewise, if you are traveling to areas of high elevation, your breathing and heart rate may be affected — you may be more prone to developing an irregular heartbeat. Ask your health care provider for recommendations.

Next page: preparing your medical equipment and medication

Carry Your Medical Records With You

Get copies of your medical records to take with you. You will need to apply in writing for the records, and getting them could take weeks, so do this well in advance of your departure date. Be aware that there may be a charge. Medical records are typically available either on paper or digitally.

If changes are made in your plan of care after you receive your medical records, be sure to note what they are. Also keep an up-to-date list of the medications you're taking.

Provide a trusted relative or friend with a copy of your medical records, including advance directives, health care surrogate information, and any other medical information you may need. While traveling, keep your records in a sealed waterproof bag, along with a list of contact information of health care providers, family and friends.

Medical alert bracelets and necklaces are now available that you can have your health care information programed into. They are reasonably priced, convenient, and can be lifesaving should an emergency arise. Check with your doctor or pharmacist for information.

Make Sure You Have Enough Medication

Make sure that you have enough refills of your medications available to last for the duration of your journey. If you take narcotic medications, you will need to ask your physician for a prescription that can be filled at a later date, as many controlled substances are not refillable by law. You cannot get refills of any medications before their due date.

If you use oxygen, make sure that you have the equipment need for your journey. Notify your medical equipment supplier if you get regular deliveries that will need to be suspended while you travel.

If you use a nebulizer machine, check to ensure that it is working properly before you leave. Inquire about the availability of battery-operated nebulizers if you will need to perform treatments en route.

Contact Your Health Insurance Provider

Examine your health insurance plan carefully. Make a list of questions that you have while reviewing your plan and call your insurance company for answers. If your policy is an HMO, out of network costs may only be covered in emergency situations.

Out of network costs quickly add up regardless of the type of health plan that you have. Policies that offer a nationwide network of providers may have limited access in some regions. If you need a specialist and are traveling in rural regions be prepared to travel long distances.

If you are taking a road trip out of the country, purchase travel medical insurance. Check with your insurer for recommendations.

Enjoy Your Trip!

Relax, have fun! Check out your route before you go. Look into the availability of regional attractions. Consider traveling with a theme in mind. For example, try to see botanical gardens or civil war historical sites along your journey.

Enjoy seeing the sights as you drive along. Even interstate highways offer plenty of interesting scenery. While en route, if you see a sign for an attraction that sounds appealing, take the time to check it out.

Take plenty of breaks to get out and walk around. Many rest areas are attractive and safe. Always listen to your body, and if you are tired, stop and rest.

Eat a healthy diet as you travel. Consider having a picnic at a rest area — you will save money and be able to meet any special dietary needs you have. If you are on a long road trip, be sure to enjoy some regional specialties, but resist the urge to grab and go at fast food places. It’s also important to stay hydrated to keep alert and thin respiratory secretions.

Anticipate delays due to roadwork, weather, traffic, and fatigue. By being flexible, you will experience less stress, breathe easier, and have a wonderful journey.