



MEDICAL NEWS

Family Time, Headaches and Beyond

To this past week, like most busy and over-worked American families, I can't remember the last time each of our scheduled breaks overlapped and opened the door for a family vacation.

Secretly, it was a fact of our lives that I wasn't terribly upset with either. Fear of work piling up and missed appointments kept me comfortably within a 30 mile radius, but after much pleading and convincing from my thirteen year old daughter, Lana, to visit our twenty-one year old daughter Lara who is studying abroad in Paris, I apprehensively agreed. Up until she pressed confirm for the flight and hotel plans, the thought of me traveling was as unlikely as the Eiffel Tower coming to Chicago. But a hop, skip and a couple of days later, we all found ourselves at O'Hare airport leaving for Paris, France. For most people, traveling comes with a laundry list of pre-departure "to-do's," but for chronic headache and pain sufferers, that list tends to be longer and carry more weight. If for nothing else than to avoid feeling lost in the jungle of another country's medical system, their preferred prescriptions and having to try to explain your symptoms through the pages of a pocket English-French dictionary: "le headache? And um, le pain," I took all the necessary steps of preparation before I left. Before outlining exactly what those are, it seems to be important to explore the underlying cause for exaggerated symptoms of a chronic pain/headache condition while traveling. In general, there are many reasons for travel-related headache exacerbation that may include, but are not limited to the related stress of preparing for a trip, weather changes, barometric pressure fluctuation, heavy luggage lifting, neck strain, everlasting lines in the airports, jet lag, and irregularities in daily habits.

For these triggers, the best treatment is prevention as much as possible. Because, aside from the medicinal side of pain management, there are things that you can do on a lifestyle level to avoid worsening of headache and pain conditions especially around the time of your trip, such as general stress management, avoiding over packing and heavy lifting, excessive bending and twisting, irregular sleep and meals, loud noise and excessive lighting.

But, having not suffered from headaches for a while now, thanks to nerve blocks and a well-designed treatment, I was hoping not to be affected by these common travel triggers. And initially, I wasn't; our first day was filled in every respect: from the crowds of Paris in the summertime to the exhausting must-see-everything itinerary, but my head stayed free and clear of any signs of headache exacerbations. But at night, as we manifested our Parisian destiny and stood in front of the sparkling Eiffel Tower, rather than being elated and enjoying every minute of the view and every bite of my crepe, I was miserably experiencing one of the worst headaches of my life. What better place could a person experience RT sided head pain, scalp tenderness, scalp hypersensitivity, nausea, excessive sensitivity to sound and severe irritation by light than in front of an imposingly large structure of flashing lights and surrounded by crowds? Lana

was worried, and suggested we get back to the hotel soon. Her sincere concern was touching, as I knew how much she had looked forward to this moment, but in order for me to be the active mother I knew she wanted for the rest of the trip, I had to get back and start treatment right away, since time is of the essence for migraine management.

Coming prepared with dependable migraine-specific medication helped me 100% with the head pain, nausea, and light and sound sensitivity. In an hour I was totally headache-free and I was able to stay up late eating pastries and relaxing with my family for the rest of the night. The rest of the trip unfolded without any more migraines, but plenty more pastries and plenty of fun. And I can truly say that being prepared made all the difference.

So what exactly is the best preparation? For one, requesting enough medications from your doctor before the trip; also if you feel worsening of your condition prior to departure, seek medical advice before you leave. Medical care is always easier in your own hometown. I'd like quickly to note that the medications should be in moderation and ideally should not include narcotics. In general, I do not believe in narcotics for chronic pain management, but I specifically do not recommend it for travelers, because of their side effects.

Preparing to manage headaches and pain while away from home doesn't mean that your destination require a visa and or passport. Even an interstate trip needs proper preparation to ensure that comfort of suppressing your pain is not confined to your hometown. As a pain sufferer, you are not supposed to be a troubled traveler as well, you can be the savvy voyager you deserve to be.

Avoiding waiting in out-of-town emergency rooms and being lost in the jungle of out-of-town clinics trying to explain the present and past medical history, often brings patients into my clinic for a pre-departure prescription fill and maybe even nerve blocks or Botox injections, if clinically warranted.

So remember, while it may always be slightly more difficult for chronic headache and pain sufferers to travel with ease, with all the advances in medicine, and correct pre-departure preparing, you can be the carefree vacationer or put-together business traveler you deserve to be.

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