4 Tips for Traveling With OAB

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

How to Prepare for Traveling With OAB

If you have had overactive bladder (OAB) for a while, you may have learned how to live with it. In fact, you may feel like you have conquered your bladder – yay! But then you schedule a vacation to Mexico, or an unexpected family emergency comes up that requires several hours of car travel, or you must make a work trip. Do you have a plan in place for traveling with OAB?

Our habits can change with travel, which can wreak havoc on our bodies, especially on the bladders of people with OAB. Here are four tips for traveling with OAB.

1. Stay Hydrated

It may seem counterintuitive. After all, drinking lots of water during a six-hour car ride means extra bathroom breaks, right?

Possibly. However, dehydration can be even worse for the bladder of an OAB sufferer. Dehydration can cause the urine to become highly concentrated, which can be irritating to the bladder. When the bladder gets irritated, this can actually exacerbate OAB symptoms, possibly causing urinary tract infections.

Instead, the American Urogynecologic Society recommends drinking when thirsty. So, when traveling, have a bottle of water available and sip when the urge strikes.

2. Plan Bathroom Breaks

If you are traveling via plane, no problem! It should be fairly easy to continue your usual bathroom routine; if possible, make sure that your layovers are long enough to allow for a bathroom break before catching the next flight.

Things can get a bit stickier for a long car trip.

You probably have a routine at home. You've probably completed a bladder training program and have conquered your bladder. On a long car trip, you are at the mercy of the next gas station or rest stop.

Instead of waiting for the next exit, take a few minutes before leaving and look at a map or your GPS. Check out where the gas stations, rest stops and restaurants are. Take note of the length of time between the locations; if you typically need to use the bathroom every 90 minutes, make a written plan of which bathrooms you will be using before you get in the car. This is great because you will not be stressing finding that rest stop!

3. Know Your Triggers and Avoid Them

Foods that are known to exacerbate OAB symptoms include coffee and other caffeinated beverages, alcohol, acidic foods, spicy foods, artificial sweeteners and excess salt.

That is an extensive list, and if you are anything like me, that list is pretty much everything I eat on vacation! The solution? Before vacation, if you have not already, do a trial elimination. Eliminate *all* of the aforementioned foods. Then, slowly add the foods back in to our diet. See how you feel. Note which foods trigger your OAB symptoms; you may find that all of the foods worsen your symptoms, or only a few of the foods worsen your symptoms.

Armed with this knowledge, it will be easier to follow your specific diet – at home or on vacation. Although certain delicacies may be tempting, knowing how they may affect your vacation and your travels may make it easier to say no to those treats.

If a certain trigger is absolutely worth it to you, ensure that you are near a bathroom. It is probably not good to have coffee and a dessert in the middle of an eight-hour car ride if you know that caffeine and sugary foods worsen your symptoms. If that slice of cake is that important, find a time in your travels when the symptoms will be most manageable.

4. Protect Yourself

Although not pretty or perhaps comfortable, having an accident is more uncomfortable. If you have not been able to effectively complete a bladder training program or if you are traveling in the car and the bathroom breaks will be just a bit longer than what you are used to, this may be especially important.

Pick up sanitary pads designed for incontinence issues. This may seem like an undesirable idea, but there are a variety of pads available at department stores and drug stores that are discreet. They are designed to hold urine as opposed to sanitary pads that are designed to hold menstrual blood, so they will be more comfortable for your specific needs.

Even if you feel like your OAB is under control and your travel plans will not interfere, it may be a good idea to have some sanitary pads available – just in case.