6 Easy Tips for Traveling With AFib

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Travel Tips for People With Atrial Fibrillation

If you have been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AFib), you can travel freely. However, there are some steps you should take to avoid complications related to your diagnosis. Use these tips for traveling with AFib to help you be prepared, so you can relax and enjoy your trip.

1. See Your Health Care Provider Prior to Traveling

Before your trip, make an appointment to meet with your cardiologist. Keep in mind that appointments with medical specialists are often booked months in advance, so make an appointment as soon you know that you will be traveling to allow time for any tests and follow up appointments.

Ask your health care provider about prescriptions and/or recommendations for medications you may need to treat common healthcare problems while you are away.

For example, learn which pain-relieving and anti-nausea medications are recommended by your health care provider. Find out which ones are effective and will not interact with medications that you are currently taking.

Many people get anxious when they travel, particularly if they are flying, and anxiety can precipitate an AFib episode. Find out if your health care provider thinks that a prescription for a mild sedative may be beneficial for you. If you're prescribed one and you have not taken it before, take a dose before you travel to see how it affects you. Keep in mind that relaxants are likely to make you drowsy, so take the necessary precautions, such as not driving, if you are using sedatives.

If you are traveling to high elevations let your doctor know, as some experts believe that exposure to high elevations may increase your risk of developing an irregular heartbeat. However, do not worry about high altitudes if you're flying, as the airplane cabin is pressurized.

If you are taking blood thinners, it is important that your medication doses are within the correct ranges prior to traveling. Develop a plan with your health care provider for having your blood drawn and medication doses adjusted while you are away if you are on an extended trip.

2. Gather Your Documents and Obtain Medication

Find the names, addresses, and phone numbers of any pharmacies, labs and hospitals at your destination. If you travel back and forth between two homes seasonally, establish a relationship with a physician in both locales and ask your doctor to recommend a specialist in the region that you are traveling to.

If you are going abroad, obtain the phone number and location of the embassy of your home county in the place that you are visiting. They can provide guidance and assistance should a healthcare issue arise.

Obtain your medical records and carry them with you — digital records are a good option. It may take a month or more for all of your records to be made available to you, and you will likely have to pay for them. However, if you contact a physician at your destination in advance to arrange medical care, records can be sent directly to that medical office, usually for free.

If you have a pacemaker, keep your device information card or documents on hand. You need to know the name and phone number of the physician who inserted the device, facility where the device was inserted, manufacturer name, contact number, and model. Make sure that you know whether your device is a simple pacemaker or a pacemaker-defibrillator combination.

Keep a list of your current medications with you and make sure you have an adequate number of refills available. Keep in mind that your insurance company will not pay for early refills, so you may want to take your prescription with you instead.

Keep all of these things — records, prescriptions and contact numbers — in an organized folder.

When packing, carry medications in your carry-on bag. Extra medications and medications which you need infrequently can go in checked baggage if you are traveling on a commercial plane, train, or ship. Check with airline regulations prior to traveling if you have liquid medications. You may not be allowed to carry large containers in your carry-on bag.

Consider purchasing a medical alert bracelet or necklace. Inexpensive ones can be purchased at pharmacies which contain your entire medical history.

Next page: four more tips for traveling with AFib.

3. Verify Insurance Coverage

Look carefully at your insurance plan. Many insurance plans only cover emergencies if you are traveling out of your area. If you belong to an HMO, coverage is likely to be very limited. Even with standard plans, co-pays and deductibles may be very high if you are traveling outside of your health care network.

Be aware that just because you’re insurance company is a nationwide provider that your particular plan may or may not offer in network coverage in all locales. Be prepared to travel long distances to obtain the care of a specialist if you are traveling to rural areas.

You will need to purchase travel health insurance if you are leaving the country regardless of health insurance that you have in your own country.

4. Relax, but Plan Ahead

Regardless of whether you are traveling in a car, train, plane, bus, or ship, the precautions which you must practice are similar.

First of all, relax! Enjoy the journey, not just your destination. Anticipate delays. Most trips go smoothly, however weather, connections, and road work may present delays. Make the decision ahead of time that you will accept these possibilities and that you are not going to let inconveniences disturb you.

If you are using public transportation, be sure that you arrive at the terminal well in advance of your departure time. This will reduce your stress levels if you encounter traffic delays on route, and will afford you with an opportunity to walk around or get something to drink.

5. Prevent Blood Clot Formation

One of the most important things that you need to do, regardless of the mode of transportation which you are using, is to move around frequently. It is especially important that you stretch your legs. Sit with both feet on the floor. Do not cross your legs.

Get up and walk around if you are on a ship or train. In a car, be sure to take frequent breaks. During your breaks, stretch all of your limbs and take a walk. If you are unable to take walks, such as on a long flight, move your legs. Tighten and release your muscles. Shift positions often.

Moving is extremely important in order to prevent the formation of blood clots. As you may be aware, people who have AFib are at an elevated risk for developing blood clots. Blood clots cause strokes, pulmonary emboli and other life threatening conditions.

If you experience leg pain or swelling, especially if accompanied by fever, localized tenderness, or redness, seek medical help quickly in order to rule out a blood clot. Seek help if you develop signs of poor clotting, such as excess bruising or bleeding from minor injuries. If you develop shortness of breath, chest pain, or signs of a stroke, get medical attention immediately.

6. Stay Hydrated

Be sure to drink plenty of fluids. If you are traveling by plane, the air in the airplane’s cabin is very dry. Dehydration can make you feel tired, develop a headache or elevate your risk of blood clot formation.

If you are driving, resist the urge to limit your intake of fluids to avoid having to stop to use the bathroom. Stay hydrated. Carry water with you at all times.

Avoid consuming alcohol and coffee. Both poses diuretic actions which serve to dehydrate you.

Bon Voyage!

While it may seem like a great deal of preparation is needed to travel, having medical records, contact information, and a list of current prescriptions handy is useful even when you are at home.

Once you obtain all of these things, you need only update them for future trips. Becase the bulk of what you need to do occurs in advance of your actual trip, by being well prepared you will be able to simply relax and enjoy your trip.