

# Crohn's Takes a Holiday: Pack Wisely and Be Prepared

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As I write this, I'm at Delta Downs Racetrack and Casino, just outside Lake Charles, Louisiana, on the first day of a weeklong anniversary trip with my husband. We're driving along the Gulf Coast from our home in Austin, Texas, to the Florida Panhandle. Although I've mapped out every stop of our itinerary, we occasionally change course when the mood strikes. So here we are, an hour and a half away from Lafayette, Louisiana, our intended destination, just to bet on the Preakness and do some light gambling.

Spontaneity is difficult when you have IBD. Planning a road trip through five states is a challenge in and of itself, considering my need to be organized and stick to a schedule. However, in addition to reserving hotel rooms and researching places to visit, I have to plan around my triggers.

With my Type A personality, avoiding my No. 1 trigger, stress, is close to impossible. The pressure starts to build about a month out as I develop an itinerary that stays within our budget and time frame. By the time we're a week away, my mind and body kick into overdrive. I rush to scratch things off my to-do list and try not to forget anything, especially my medications. No matter how hard I try to keep calm, the familiar, unpleasant churning in my stomach begins. It usually lasts the first day or two of our trip, and then I'm finally able to relax.

During a vacation, I also have to be mindful about managing my diet and staying hydrated. Sometimes I don't have any or much control over what or when I can eat or drink. Packing a cooler full of sandwich fixings and snacks helps us avoid greasy fast food when we're driving. Several times, impromptu stops have resulted in sightseeing adventures when we were looking for a scenic picnic location.

If we plan to stay in one place for more than a day or two, we'll book a hotel with a kitchenette and buy a few staples so we can cook instead of eating out. Being able to prepare our own meals not only keeps my digestive system happy, but also saves money. When we do indulge in local delicacies, I follow the same rules as I do at home by not ordering any overly rich, cream-based, or deep-fried foods.

Meeting my required water intake is something else I struggle with while I'm away from home. I try to drink at least 88 ounces of water a day because I'm active, and living in the South, I start to sweat as soon as I step outside the door. Keeping a 24-ounce tumbler or 16-ounce bottle of water on me at all times isn't the problem. Finding a restroom — especially a clean one — when I need it is another story. If I drank as much water as I usually do at home, we would have to stop every two hours for a bathroom break, adding time to an already long trip.

Crohn's has ruined my ability to pack light. In the Deep South, we like to say you can experience four seasons in one day. A 60-degree May morning may seem balmy to some, but in the South, we pull out our sweaters and coats. On the other hand, the average 85-degree high temperature can feel like 95 degrees when the humidity is just as high. A rainstorm can push an otherwise pleasant day toward one of these extremes, and you never know which one you'll get.

In addition to packing a versatile wardrobe that can satisfy all weather conditions, I need clothes for the unexpected flare, or even an onset of mild symptoms. This involves extra underwear (no explanation necessary), elasticized pants for days when bloating is an issue, and flowing dresses for when elastic pants don't do the trick. I probably only wear half the clothes I pack, but I'd rather be safe than sorry.

Now that I've written my column, the real vacation begins. By the time this is published, my summer glow will have returned after a couple of days basking on the white sugar sand beach by the clear, emerald-green waters of Destin, Florida. According to my schedule, we'll be driving to my birth state of Alabama before heading back home to Texas. I'll be sad when my restful week is coming to an end, but my body will be ready to return to its regular routine.

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