



Driving With Migraine Doesn't Have to Be Painful

by SARAH RATHSACK

Tips for Driving With Migraine

Let's face it — driving in the car is inevitable. Whether it be around the corner or road tripping across the country, you are going to be effected by your migraines. So what do you do, not get in a car? No, instead you just battle and prepare the best you can.

Car Ride in Snow

I live in a climate where the entire sky, ground and flurries are all the same color. Everything is bright white.

Being that I have light sensitivity, the glare off the snow pierces straight through my eyes. Needless to say, I wear sunglasses. I often wear glasses that have a FL-41 lens to block out glare.

The snow can be so distracting and the lenses allow my eyes to relax and see the road better through a different light. I also often wear hoodies or hats (depending on how the hat fits and how it feels on my head) in order to block out additional peripheral light

When I am getting (or already have) a migraine, my feet and nose get extremely cold. When I get cold, I get so cold my bones ache. I like to warm my feet and hands under the car heater.

If my migraine is above a five on the pain scale, I typically don't drive. I keep hand warmers in my glove box, so when I am a passenger I use them to allow my driver to have more control over the car temperature while I need additional warmth.

Car Ride in the Sun

Sunny days are hard to enjoy with a migraine. On a hot sunny day, I fight the brightness and humidity. Again, I wear sunglasses. If I'm a passenger I use an ice hat.

The ice helps to fight the humidity and overheating. Although my hands, feet and nose get cold, I overheat easily when I'm in the sun.

If the humidity is high I keep the windows closed, and if it is low, I enjoy fresh air. It seems like my driver and I are constantly turning the air conditioning on and off, which dries out my contacts and lips so I make sure to carry some gloss and drops.

Car Ride on a Cloudy Day

Cloudy days seem to be the least painful for me. On cloudy days with a low grade migraine I find driving is easier. I can distract myself with putting my focus on driving.

Driving allows me to anticipate changing lanes, stops and bumps in the road. When I am a passenger I feel like people are merging into the car or that my driver is stopping too suddenly. I like the control and distraction of driving.

While cloudy days seem to be the easiest, I also find they are the days that the barometric pressure is changing. Changes in the weather are not good for me!

Any big swing in temperature and pressure really triggers me. Because of this, I bring my medications with me. One second I can be driving and singing to the music and the next my migraine is building.

I like to carry my rescue medication (in its prescribed bottle) and water with me to slow down a migraine and avoid dehydration. I also always have my insurance card and doctor's phone number with me to be prepared.

Car Ride in the Rain at Night

Being in a car at night while it's raining is the hardest thing for me. I was on a road trip for four hours of rain at night and it was a nightmare.

Night heightened my auras and I saw rings and squiggle lines on all the headlights and overhead lamps. Even the reflection in the rear view mirror was too bright. On my four-hour journey I ended up crawling in the backseat, laying down on a pillow and covering myself with a blanket.

The loud rain and squeak of the windshield wipers was really loud. I couldn't look out the front windshield with the auditory and visual firestorm ahead. So I put on my headphones and controlled my breathing the best I could.

Long Car Rides

Long car rides require a bit more planning. Prior to a trip I typically pack my medications or take them preventatively. Motion sickness pills or patches are nice to keep close by.

I get terrible nausea with my migraines. I typically don't get car sick, but my migraines complicate things enough that I don't travel without items to deal with my stomach.

I bring a bag for if I get sick, with Tums, hand wipes, paper towels, a change of clothes and saltines to use if my nausea turns into vomiting.

I typically get tense in the car while driving a long way. I use essential oils to help remind me to breathe deeply and smell scents that relax me. I use migraine or muscle rub gel for my neck and shoulders to help release tension.

I also like to stop frequently, mostly because I drink a ton of water. Staying hydrated is always a priority. At those stops I like to get out and stretch my body and breathe some fresh air.

It's a good idea to bring money along with you for stops along the way. Along with water, I like to drink Gatorade and caffeine. I also end up buying mints, ginger candy, a protein bar, and possibly a craving I'm having (chocolate). I need to eat every few hours to keep my blood sugars stable and I always have something I need to buy.

How to Prepare and Survive a Car Ride

Here is a summary of some of the things that will help prepare for a car ride when you suffer from migraines:

- Take meds prior if needed
- Bring preventatives, motion sickness and anti-anxiety pills

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- Insurance card and doctor's phone number
 - Water and lip gloss/balm
 - Barf bags, tums, hand wipes, paper towels and change of clothes
 - Sunglasses, eye shades and contact lens drops
 - Pillow and blanket
 - Ice pack and hand warmers
 - Headphones and ear plugs
 - Money for drinks and snacks
 - Hair tie and hat
 - Essential oils and Vicks/migraine gel

What type of weather is best or worst for you to travel in? How do you prepare for car trips?