Driving Safely When You Have Fibromyalgia

by YVONNE BANKS

Driving With Fibromyalgia

Stress is a trigger for many conditions, and fibromyalgia is one of them. Stress is a common trigger of flare ups, and driving is a stressor that can bring about fibromyalgia symptoms, especially if you get stuck in traffic that makes it difficult to get home or get to work on time. As well as being stressful, driving requires you to sit in a position and move in ways that may worsen your pain.

Trains, buses and taxis are options in many towns, but public transportation comes with its own stresses and is not available everywhere. Many people with fibromyalgia cannot walk or bike very far without pain, and getting a ride is not always an easy task.

As a result of all this, you may not be able to avoid driving — especially if you work. Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to better cope with stressful driving situations.

The Risks of Driving With Fibromyalgia

- **Increased pain –** Sitting in the same position for prolonged periods of time can cause pain and discomfort. It doesn't allow for proper blood circulation, and sitting in one spot can pinch off nerves in the legs, causing more pain.
- **Overstimulation –** Any type of overstimulation that comes about from speeding cars, the noise, heavy traffic, and other visual and auditory sensory input can be added stress for the fibromyalgia patient.
- **Fibro fog –** Fibro fog, or cognitive troubles associated with fibromyalgia, can make it difficult for you to pay attention to the road. This can make being behind the wheel dangerous not only for you, but other drivers.

Things You Can Do to Help

If you need to drive, you can make some adjustments and improve your experience and make for a safer driving experience.

Get a Good Night's Sleep

It is imperative to sleep well the night before you are driving so you are not exhausted the next day. This will help prevent grogginess, which can cause a safety issue for you and others on the road.

If you find you are extremely fatigued, see if you can get another person to drive for you. Check with your doctor about getting medication to help you sleep or try the supplement melatonin for a better night's rest.

Plan Your Route

Figure out where you're going and plan your route ahead of time. You will want to find the route that is least likely to have traffic or obstacles like construction.

If you have GPS, use it, as it removes some of the stress of having to remember where you're going. Additionally, there are apps for your phone that can tell you how traffic looks on the main highways and interstates so you can avoid traffic jams.

Make Sure You're Comfortable

Make sure your seat is comfortable as possible and that your posture is correct while driving — aim to be sitting up straight the same way you would at a desk. You may have to adjust your seat and mirrors to achieve this. If you're still uncomfortable after making adjustments, try out a different headrest, or use a cushion or back support.

Take Breaks

If you are driving a for an extended period of time, take regular breaks to get out and stretch, and to rest your eyes and brain for a little while.

Consider Alternatives

If you're finding that driving causes you too much pain, or you become too disoriented while behind the wheel, look for alternative transport options. You may want to organize a carpool to work, work out how often you can afford to taxi, or, if you don't have too far to go, consider a mobility scooter.

If you're not feeling up to driving, don't. Your safety, and that of everyone else on the road, is far more important than arriving at your destination.