



## HOLIDAY TIPS FOR VESTIBULAR PATIENTS

Holidays can be challenging for vestibular patients for many reasons. Family and social engagements often cause sensory over-stimulation, resulting in fatigue, and often triggering symptoms (e.g. dizziness, vertigo). In addition, for some, high sodium foods can be a trigger. As a result, many vestibular patients avoid social situations altogether. How can you enjoy the holidays without undue negative consequences? Here are some tips shared by other vestibular patients.

### PARTIES/SOCIALIZING

Social events can be the heart of any holiday celebration; they can also be very draining and exacerbate your vestibular symptoms. Taking a few precautions can allow you to participate without feeling totally wiped out the next day.

- Arrive early and leave early (if you feel you need to). There may be fewer people and therefore less noise early in the evening. It may also be easier to find a place to sit.
- Use the “spoon” method to manage your energy level. Consider that you only have a limited number of “spoons” (represents a unit of energy), and that when they are used up you will need to rest to replenish them. Use your spoons wisely.
- If necessary, take short breaks by finding a quiet room; if there is no empty room available, try escaping to the bathroom for a few minutes.
- Establish an “exit plan” in advance with a person that is accompanying you or someone who can come and pick you up. Be clear that you need them to be sober.
- Talk with the host/hostess in advance to let them know that you might need to leave early or find a quiet place to lie down.
- In a larger venue such as a restaurant or hotel, try to avoid sitting near ceiling fans, speakers, doors to the noisy kitchen, etc.
- At a dinner table, sit at an end or corner so you don’t have to move your head so much to follow dinner conversation. It also makes getting up from the table for a short break easier.
- If sodium is a trigger for you, let your host/hostess know in advance and ask if they could either keep the salt on the side or let you know which dishes do not have salt/sodium (see VeDA’s tips on how to be aware of hidden sodium at [vestibular.org/diet](http://vestibular.org/diet)). You might also want to eat in advance, or bring your own dish that you know is safe for you to eat.
- This isn’t the time to shirk your cane or walker because you’re afraid of what people might think. Be safe, and use assistive devices as needed to prevent falls.
- Stay hydrated, and keep on your medication schedule.
- Know your triggers, and avoid them when possible. When it is not possible to avoid them, do what you can to minimize them. Check in with your body periodically so you do not push yourself beyond your limits without realizing it.
- Use VeDA’s [Crisis Planning Toolkit](#).

### FLYING ADVICE

Some people with vestibular disorders can have an increase in their symptoms when flying. Some

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suggestions for flying include:

- Choose seats in advance when you book your tickets (if you prefer window or aisle, etc.).
- Take a decongestant before getting on the plane (you may want to check with your doctor before choosing an over-the-counter decongestant).
- If migraines exacerbate your vestibular symptoms you may want to pre-medicate with an anti-migraine medication when you first board the airplane, especially if it's a long flight.
- Wear a scopolamine patch to counteract any possible increase in nausea (these can be purchased at a pharmacy).
- Pre-board the airplane so that you can go ahead of everyone; you don't need a doctor's note, you just need to tell a gate attendant at the airport that you have an invisible medical condition before they begin boarding.
- Use a cane or walking stick or a piece of luggage with a handle to hold onto to steady yourself when walking along the narrow aisles within the plane.
- Wear "EarPlanes", a type of ear plug that helps to equalize pressure better and limit noise (these can be found at a pharmacy).
- Hydrate! Drink lots of water to maintain the fluids in your body.
- You may want to arrange for a wheelchair to transport you through the airport. Airports are hectic around the holidays, and the busy patterns on the carpet can trigger symptoms.

## TAKING A TRAIN

- Sit facing forward in the direction the train is moving; avoid a backward facing seat.
- If there is a second level, sit there. Close the blinds so you are not distracted by the scenery moving past.

## EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS

If you are traveling alone, especially by car, you may want to consider the following precautions:

- Carry a cell phone; make sure you have a charger with you.
- Consider wearing a medical ID bracelet that tells emergency medical responders about your condition.
- Make sure you have a good emergency road service.
- Let someone know when you leave, what your destination is, what route you are taking, and when you expect to be there.
- Keep hydrated (we can't emphasize this enough), and take frequent breaks.
- If you can, avoid high traffic commutes. This may mean leaving a day before most other holiday travelers, and returning a day before or after.
- Know where the nearest emergency room is. You may want to keep their phone number handy.
- Carry important phone numbers on a piece of paper, in case your phone loses its charge. You can always ask to borrow someone else's phone.
- Make sure you have a supply of necessary medication on hand. You may need to order some in advance, as filling prescriptions can take longer over the holidays.

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