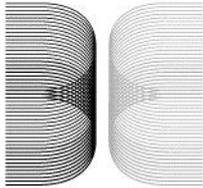


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## Bipolarity

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## International Travel & Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar sufferers also tend to be heavily affected by changes in sleeping patterns and time zones. Travelling internationally presents some challenges when you have Bipolar but if you plan ahead of time and take some precautions it is possible to achieve an episode free trip.

Travelling is stressful for everyone. We are in unfamiliar surrounds, our bodyclocks are out, the days are often long and event filled, it's exhausting, exhilarating, stressful,

Here are some points to consider:

- Speak with your medical support team (i.e your psychologist, psychiatrist, GP) about your travel plans beforehand. Tell them about any issues you think you might have, like claustrophobia or anxiety that could present as a trigger for an attack from stress induced mania. Perhaps ask about getting a short prescription to help you cope with the travel element of your holiday, such as diazepam (valium). It could just calm your nerves enough to remain rational. **Keep in close contact with your doctor and/or therapist leading up to your date of departure to make sure you're healthy before leaving.** If you have recently changed medications or have recently had an unstable period, it can sometimes be best to avoid travel.
- Always ensure you take with you enough of your normal medications. If at all possible, take a few days extra in case you lose some or require more for whatever reason. It can be helpful to get your prescription in small tablet doses so that if you are more stressed/depressed/manic for a few days you can change dosages in 25ml increments (this will change markedly according to what medications you take). Talk to your psychiatrist about this idea and be sure to understand the safety parameters of such.
- Travel with 2 sets of medications. Depending on the duration of your trip take enough in your hand luggage for at least a few days and the remainder in your suitcase. All medications are allowed through the security checkpoint once they have been screened, so put them in your

hand luggage. This way if your suitcase does happen to go missing you have enough on you in person to survive for a few days until it is recovered.

- Be sure to carry a letter of prescription from your psychiatrist which details your diagnosis, home address and full details of all medications that you take. If possible take your meds in their original boxes with the prescription stickers so you do not have problems with customs. This can assist with ease through customs and also help if you do have a hospitalisation or require more medication whilst overseas.
- It's not always possible, but If it is do try to travel with someone you trust. They will be able help you remember your medications, share the stress of travelling and help you remain calm. If that's not possible there are organizations that, for a fee, provide professional companion travellers, such as *Accessible Journeys* . Having a trustworthy travel companion who's capable of identifying any early warning signs of mania or depression and who knows what to do in case of a mood episode would be great. If that's not an option, maybe you can enlist the assistance of someone at each of your destination points.
- Don't rush about doing things at the last minute – take your time and plan. Pack in advance. Get to the airport as early as is allowed for early book in. Sit down somewhere with a tea or coffee and a good book, or whatever else you find restful and comforting. Perhaps you prefer a shop, food, your iPod? Ensure you have had adequate rest the night before.
- You might feel safer or more comfortable telling a steward about any issues. Flight crews are aware of any air marshals among the passengers, and will be able to tell them of your condition. Particularly if you do start to feel unwell.
- Do you have a way of contacting your medical team should a need arise? (I,e buy a cheap phone card, or have a mobile that has international roaming). Have your doctors numbers on person.
- Make sure you have flight insurance so you can cancel the flights if need be without suffering any financial hardship.
- Look for ways to make your trip less stressful. You may want to schedule fewer activities, for example, and make sure your schedule includes sufficient down time.
- Have you taken precautions so that you can not access excessive money should an episode occur? It is never a good idea to carry a bunch of credit cards when experiencing the stress of traveling.
- Do you have a clearly mapped out route so that you do not

experience the frustration of becoming lost and confused. This alone can be enough to throw you into an episode.

- Get enough sleep! Ensure that no matter where you are or what you are doing day to day you ensure that you plan to get your regular hours of sleep. This is imperative!

IN SUMMARY The three biggies are these:

1) Take your meds as prescribed. 2) Get enough sleep! 3) Avoid stress where possible.

### **YOUR TRAVELLING TOOL BOX**

Last but certainly not least is a Tool Box/Bag. When travelling it is easy to get triggered and you can often find yourself stuck in places or environments that must be endured or can be triggering (like airplane cabins, airport lounges, bus and transit centres, noisy hotel rooms etc). Having some handy comforting items can help you endure these easier and prevent prolonged stress.

Here it is – You can change things in your tool box which are more personal to you – but when selecting things, think of how they affect your senses.

#### **Prepare a toolbox to take to get you through the difficult moments of travel**

**Something to listen to.** For example a guided meditation track or CD's or playlist on your iPod. Use the recording two or three times before you fly, or when in anything which is usually very crowded or stressful – like the London Underground. Or switch it on when boarding and getting seated on the plane, or entering the underground. You can get many forms of relaxation tracks very cheaply on the internet and iTunes. Even your favourite relaxing music or classical music can help. If you don't have such music devices listen to the on-plane relaxation station – most airlines have a "chillout" or "relaxation" station on their plane entertainment systems.

**Something to smell.** Comforting smells can be very powerful and even induce relaxation. Lavender, ginger and bergamot can be very relaxing. You can purchase a roll on oil which has lavender and bergamot in it. Or you can travel with a bottle of essential oil and add to your hotel pillow or rub on your pulse points.

**Something to taste.** Fruit flavoured boiled sweets or jelly beans are a good idea to have on you. Sometimes if you feel sick or nauseous if stressed a hit of sugar helps. Also, you have to suck the sweet, which gives you something to focus on – like its taste, how small it is getting, and the texture of it on your tongue. It can be a great distraction tool.

**Something to drink.** Water – Everyone should travel with a bottle of water anyway. Plane travel especially is very dehydrating, and if you're prone to anxiety or you take large doses of medications (esp Lithium) you need to

hydrate often and stay away from caffeine (in coffee/tea/softdrink) and alcohol of course.

**Something to cool you down.** Hand held fans are a great idea, or mineral water sprays in aerosol cans, or wet wipes with a scent are also effective. Heat is a stressor. When travelling you can often be exposed against your control to high temperatures.

**Something to warm you up.** Conversely being cold on an airplane can interfere with your ability to get to sleep or stay comfortable. Take a warm pair of socks and a cardigan or light jumper. Some airlines offer blankets, which is nice too.

**Something to calm you down.** Whatever it may be. Sometimes a small dosage of valium or your prescribed sleeper/sedative can help in stressful situations. Or a natural alternative like Valerian. Be sure to always (no matter where you are or what your travel itinerary is) get your normal hours of sleep.

**Something to read/do.** Kindles or ipads are a great distraction tool. Otherwise a good book or a diary to write in can be just as good. It's a great idea to start reading a great book BEFORE you board, because then you can usually get right back into it on the plane. Soduko or crosswords are also a great idea. Magazines, comics, a sketch pad, a laptop. Whatever engages you.

SAFE TRAVELS!!!

BE MINDFUL OF YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE

AND ENJOY!

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