

A Day in the Life



of an Autoimmune Arthritis Patient

Created by the International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis

Driving



Remember when you were finally old enough to drive? You learned the rules of the road & worried mostly about getting the car for the night out or if the drive through was open late. No one prepares you for the challenges involved with driving and Autoimmune Arthritis...so we will.

Energy Bank



The extra energy it takes for you to drive depends on the length of drive and how prepared your body is for the drive . Patients with Autoimmune Arthritis must constantly manage their energy levels to ensure they can function properly throughout the day.



Freezing joints: Unlike the more commonly known Degenerative Arthritis (also called simply 'arthritis') the type of joint pain involved with these diseases is a result of the bodies' cells combatting each other, which produces inflammation. This inflammation feels much like an injury, which in itself is painful and can come and go in a variety of locations without warning. Another issue that is different is a phenomena called "freezing". Particularly after extended use or movement, the body will 'rest' and cool down. This is prime time for 'locking up', which is quite dangerous.

If the hands or feet lock, the patient may not be able to properly hold the wheel or push the gas or brake. To avoid this, patients should take extra precaution, especially after periods of exercise, to keep their joints warm, without too much time of inactivity. It is during the inactivity where the freezing may occur.

Patients, make a conscious effort to roll wrists, bend fingers and stretch ankles at stop lights. If you are driving for long distances stop every hour to move your body. Walk, bend, stretch, anything to keep your body warm. If you have one, use the seat heater to keep your body warm. There are patients who have reported accidents because they suddenly couldn't push down on the break (ankle lock) and other similar episodes with freezing.

Driving

Neck, back, sacroiliac pain: While some of the Autoimmune Arthritis diseases affect these areas more often than others, all the diseases are cellular, which means ANY joint in the body OR any tissue (connective or soft) can be affected. Long bouts of inactivity can greatly aggravate Autoimmune Arthritis, especially in these areas. Flares in the neck may even trigger jaw flares or migraines. If you feel you are too stiff to drive, stop.

Fatigue: These diseases, because the cells fight, causing the body to create inflammation as if it is fighting off an illness, the patient will often feel fatigued, even after a full night of rest. Take care of your eyes by wearing protective sunglasses and keep lubricating eye drops nearby.

Uveitis: While more common in Juvenile Arthritis, uveitis , or inflammation of the eyes, is not uncommon for those diagnosed with Autoimmune Arthritis. Symptoms include seeing 'spots' (often described as black floaters), pressure in the eyes causing the patient to feel they want to squint hard or press on them. The eyes also may be sensitive to light and vision could appear hazy. Severe flares can cause temporary vision loss. It is best NOT to drive if your eyes are flaring. If you suspect you have Uveitis it is recommended to visit an Ophthalmologist for proper treatment.

Probably the best choice you can make is to choose a car model that is forgiving to your disease. Automatic, ergonomic, and easy to get in and out of.