

Tips for travelling when you've got fatigue

Webinar Q&A Capture

Question: I live in the States and booked a trip to Ireland a few days ago!! I'm a mix of excited and nervous. The trip is 15 months away though, so I have lots of time. I'm going to get serious about pacing and doing all I can over that time to get my level of wellness as good as possible! But I have two questions:

1. It's a bus tour – several hours a day, with private music concerts in the evening. I might not be able to do everything every day (it's a 9 day tour) – how do I deal with 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) and see it as a gift to myself?
2. I'm trying to see if I can bring a scooter, but I'm not sure if that will be possible. I have POTS, and my question is what do you suggest for the more physical/walking parts of the tour.

Answer: With regards to your first question – our brains are actually wired to default to spotting 'lack' more than 'gain'. It's a helpful evolutionary development, because focussing on what we *don't* have helps to drive us to keep seeking more (whether that's healthy nourishment, a better job, more joyful moments etc etc). However, when we're on a lengthy health journey, there's no doubt that this natural default to focus more on what's not right, strengthens. But the good news is that it's very possible to help your brain reset back to a more balanced place – we just have to give it some help. I suggest you catch any thoughts (before and during your trip) around how unfair it is that you might not be able to do everything that's included, and focus on how wonderful it will be to just be on this wonderful trip!!

I've tried over the years to come up with an alternative acronym, and the best I've come up with so far is JODI – the Joy of Doing It! As in, rather than find yourself in Ireland thinking about the things that you can't do (the 'lack'); try and focus on the absolute joy of doing the things that you ARE able to participate in (the 'gain').

For your second question, please also remember that 15 months is a long time to achieve improvements in your level of wellness. And so do remain hopeful that the trip will be more manageable by then, than it feels right now. But should you still be in a position to require a little bit of mobility help, a scooter would be a great idea – if there's room for them to stow it in the coach. Please don't worry if not though, there are definitely other things to explore: a folding wheelchair (ask if there'll be someone there who can help you with this); a folding walker with a seat attached – I have many clients who find these so helpful; or even just a walking stick to give you a little support. You mentioned during the Q&A that you've considered buying a lightweight camping chair/stool to take around with you if you need a rest during the walks – another great idea!

The key thing is don't be reticent to ask for help – it could make a huge difference in how much you're able to enjoy your vacation. Plan things ahead of time, spot what might be helpful to put in place or at least discuss with the tour organisers ahead of time. And then relax and get excited about your wonderful trip!

Question: Do you have suggestions about how often you should break a car journey for closed-eye rest.

Answer: It's difficult to give an exact answer for this of course, because the context of the specific situation will define the guidance I'd give. But I would say, if possible, every hour or so. For example, if someone was still fairly early on in their fatigue journey, and still had quite a low baseline, and was going on a 3 hour drive... I'd probably suggest they planned to stop two times during that journey. For longer journeys – say, 5 or 6 hours, perhaps it's not practical to stop every hour. But I'd encourage someone to try to at least have a break every 1.5/2 hours minimum. Erring on the side of caution and resting more than you feel you need can't be a bad thing!

Question: How do you deal with the fear before going on a trip?

I hope one thing that came through as a theme from the webinar you've just watched, is my absolute encouragement to plan and shape a travel plan that you can feel CONFIDENT about. You want to neutralise the fear with a confident plan! The guidance in my webinar was, of course, general in nature and fairly high level due to the group nature of the session. But take the essence from the points I shared, and other helpful things you've learned, and think about how you can plan a trip that feels smart and achievable.

If you just can't find a way to possibly feel confident about your trip, have a think about whether this is because your brain is stuck in overthinking the less helpful elements; or whether your plan isn't actually as smart and achievable as it needs to be. If it's the former (your brain is used to feeling fearful of things) give some helpful close attention to reframing your thoughts, and gently persuade your brain to feel more comfortable about the prospect of travelling (I give my clients lots of help around this, but there are also lots of podcasts and YouTube videos about reframing that you could listen to).

But do remember that it will be impossible to get your brain feeling truly confident and comfortable about a plan that's way out of sync with what's possibly achievable right now. If someone was in the early stages of their fatigue journey and really wanted to go on a multi-destination vacation, involving travelling for several hours a day, and lots of different locations to get used to.... They might find it difficult to define a plan that they can feel confident about. Because their brain will refuse to let go of the fact that the specific details of the trip are clearly way beyond their current capability.

So, choose a trip that feels fairly aligned with where you are right now energy-wise, plan it smartly, and then give close attention to regularly telling yourself that it's ok to relax and get excited about it – you CHOOSE to feel confident about the trip!

Question: What's PEM?

Answer: PEM stands for 'post exertional malaise'. It's often a signature symptom for those with a fatigue challenge – particularly those with 'chronic fatigue' related issues, such as ME/CFS and Long Covid.

It describes the situation where you don't necessarily feel that you're pushing things to far, **at the time that you're doing something**. Indeed, you can feel as though the activity went really well at the time, and was even enjoyable. The symptomatic flare as a response to having overdone it, doesn't actually kick in until a day or two later. (Most people seem to have a 24 hour pattern, some people it's 36 or 48 – again, everyone is different.)

So, for example, someone might decide to go for a longer walk than usual one day, and it seems to go really well. They enjoyed the walk and are happy that it felt manageable. BUT around 24 hours later, out of the blue (seemingly), they get hit with a flare of fatigue-related symptoms. At first this can be confusing, because they don't feel they've done anything immediately before this flare to have caused the symptoms...but over time people start to join the dots and realise that they're experiencing a delayed onset of having done too much.

The best way to avoid PEM is to master pacing/energy management! You learn what your comfortable limits are 'right now' and if you can stick to them fairly consistently, you shouldn't experience PEM. Instead, you gradually nudge up your activity to slowly bring back your level of wellness at the rhythm your system is comfortable with. I help people figure this out in my on-demand Fatigue Reset course: <https://pamelarose.podia.com>

Question: How do you plan in advance when fatigue levels can be variable and unpredictable.

Answer: This is a great follow-on question from the above one about PEM! The goal of pacing/energy management is to find your current comfortable level of activity, and to give some close attention to trying to stay within that range each day. It takes a bit of planning and effort, but gosh it's worth it! It's only once you've figured this out, that the days start to become less varied and move to being a bit more predictable.

So, my answer to this question is largely to encourage you to think about whether you really think you've mastered pacing/energy management yet? If not, it really will be hugely helpful to give this some priority attention. Again, I can help with that if you need it.

This isn't only helpful for approaching travel plans – it's very difficult to achieve wonderful improvements if you're still having quite a bit of variety in your days. To get into, and stay in, a healing state, it's so helpful to give your system a predictable state within which to operate each day. It starts to spot how much energy you consistently need to carry out your days, and in turn knows how much it's got left to use to dig-in and achieve the healing and restoration that it wants to be able to do.

Question: I do see your point that one-night trips aren't necessarily a good idea, but I can't necessarily always stretch to being able to get away for more than a day/night. How can I manage these shorter trips well?

Answer: Great question! There will be times when an opportunity arises that has to, for various reasons, be a short one-nighter trip. Or even a day trip! And my top advice for these situations is to focus on "making it go as well as it possibly can". It might not be possible to plan things so that you're comfortably within your baseline (that is, your current comfortable level of activity) – but with some smart planning you can still reduce the total effort considerably, and make things go a version of well.

The other point to make, is that I do encourage you to have a good think about situations such as these. For example, you might really love the idea of travelling to another city to visit a wonderful art exhibition. But it really does feel a big thing to do right now, and you could only afford to go away for one night. In this sort of situation, we often have to have a good hard think, and sometimes make some difficult priority calls. One of the toughest parts of a fatigue journey is finding acceptance around the fact that we can't do many of the things that we would usually love to do. This is so tough! But making tough priority calls, and reluctantly deciding that you'll catch a show/exhibition/friend the next time they're in town, is often going to be the smart thing to do.

So, in summary, if it's something you REALLY want to do and are prepared to feel the after-effects for a few days if you do it... plan smartly, and switch to a focus of 'making it go as well as it possibly can'! I usually suggest these sorts of decisions are saved for situations where if you don't do that thing right now, you'll miss out (like someone's wedding, or milestone birthday etc).

Question: Would you use the same rules/guidance for travelling to have surgery?

Answer: Basically, yes! If the hospital is a way from home, and involves a journey to get there, and then a few nights away from home, all of the tips from this webinar will help. There are other things that can help specifically for this type of situation though – some helpful mindset things that aren't in the topic of today's webinar. But also some practical things such as taking proper noise-blocking ear plugs! (see link at the end of my slide deck for a recommendation!) Please reach out if you want to discuss some specifics?

Question: I'm doing quite a lot of studying at the moment, is it worth having a break from this while I'm away? Or will that create more anxiety than it will help?

Answer: That's a great question – I often hear this from the people I'm helping, often from those who are working – should they be sneaking peeks at their inbox while they're away etc!

I suggest you have a think about how it would feel to pause your studies for a week or two while you're away. If this is going to make you feel really quite bothered, then consider

allowing yourself a certain amount of time – perhaps an hour a day. And be firm about sticking to that!

However, I do encourage people to use their vacations to properly relax and switch off a bit. Experiencing joy and having some lovely, pleasant times away, is so good for us – I encourage all of my clients to try to prioritise nourishing their souls and finding joyful moments as much as possible. Even if it means, potentially, slightly prolonging the length of their fatigue rescue journey.

It's easy to think that we must prioritise healing activities over EVERYTHING else. That if we eliminate all joy from our lives and stay in a grip of determination to only do helpful things, that our journey will be shorter. But!!...I have to say that I don't see those journeys being the most successful. It's important to make your recovery journey feel as 'liveable' as possible. And if that means potentially prolonging things by a few weeks because you've allowed yourself to slow things down a bit and prioritise joy and pleasure, then I actually think that in itself will almost help to ensure things go well – not hold them back.

Question: I'm going to go and see family and people I've not seen for a long time. Any tips around setting boundaries in these situations? For people who don't know what I'm going through and what I need?

Answer: I have a lot of guidance to give!! But given the time we have today the best way for you to hear it from me is via some of my other on-demand webinars, both priced at £15: <https://pamelarose.podia.com>

Communicating with others when you've got fatigue: this is a great way to hear my advice around how to manage some of those potentially tricky conversations you need to have when you're tackling a fatigue challenge.

When a loved one has fatigue: this one is for your relatives/close friends – outsource the explanation to me! I help to explain what it's like for you, what they can do (or not do!) to help you, and the importance of looking after themselves too.

Question: I have recently booked a trip with my garden club group to Jersey in May. This is something I have never done before and is way outside my comfort zone! I usually travel with my partner but I'm going by myself this time. My problem is controlling my anxiety around this. I get anxious generally although much better than I used to be.

Answer: This has very much been a theme that's come out of this Q&A session – and it's exactly why I wanted to run this webinar. It really is important (and very possible!) to feel much more confident about this wonderful trip to Jersey. Here's a suggestion:

Step 1: Try picturing yourself going on this trip – leaving the house to head to the airport/bus station etc. Do you look confident when you visualise this future event? If not,

what is it that you're feeling anxious about? What specifically is stopping you from looking as though you're confident and excited about leaving for this trip to Jersey?

Step 2: Write down all of the reasons this future version of you isn't feeling confident. Make a list!

Step 3: Place a mark against points on that list that you, theoretically, have some control over. E.g. what will the food be like; or how late will be getting back to our accommodation each day?

Then gradually put in a plan/do something about each of these. E.g. call the organiser and talk things through, explain what you need, get some reassuring answers. Hopefully you'll be able to feel more relaxed about things then.

Step 4: Look at the remaining items on your list – the things that you haven't marked as something you can do something about. These, by definition, are probably things that you just can't plan for (e.g. what if our plane is late). Have a final think about whether there is anything you could do to help that situation...but if not, make a conscious decision to get that 'bothering' out of your mind. It's not something that you can control, so don't give it any focus!

A final note from me on this: Another regular unhelpful thought that my clients often have is along the lines of "but what if things don't go well and I feel bad when I get back?". That's a default thought for many of us when we're on a fatigue journey *but* it really doesn't serve us well. Plan smartly, get to a place where things are feeling confident, and then focus on making each day 'go as well as it possibly can'. That really is the best thing you can do! Don't worry about things that haven't happened yet, focus on how you can make them go as well as they can 😊