

For Immediate Release

## **Travel Healthy and Protect Your Back**

### ***Dr. Daveed Frazier with Atlantic Spine Center offers back-friendly travel tips***

West Orange, NJ, June 2015 - The summer vacation season is here: sizzling temperatures, fruity drinks and . . . back pain? Heady anticipation of summer travel plans can mask the fact that travel itself can leave our backs – which often bear the brunt of heavy luggage, cramped transportation and unfamiliar beds – vulnerable to further injury, according to Daveed Frazier, MD, an orthopedic spine surgeon at Atlantic Spine Center.

“Travel can be extraordinarily hard on the spine, something that may seem like an afterthought when we’re excitedly making plans for our summer vacation,” explains Dr. Frazier, who completed two spinal surgery fellowships and is a published author on spine disorders and treatment. “But between cumbersome bags, uncomfortable seats and too-soft or –firm hotel mattresses, the very idea of travel can be daunting for those with pre-existing back or neck pain.”

But injuring – or further injuring – your spine while on vacation doesn’t have to happen if commonsense measures are taken before and during your trip, he says. Here’s what Dr. Frazier tells his patients about how to protect their backs while traveling.

### **How can you avoid back injury while traveling?**

No matter where your travels take you, the one thing almost everyone needs to deal with is luggage. Beyond packing lightly, if possible, try to use luggage with wheels so you don’t need to strain your back to carry heavy bags. Other baggage-conscious tips include:

- **Bending at the knees** and using leg muscles to lift bags, rather than bending at the waist.
- **Avoiding twisting** the lower back while lifting bags.
- **Distributing weight evenly** on each side of the body
- **Carrying shoulder bags** on alternate shoulders for short periods of time to avoid stressing one side of the back.
- **Renting a pushcart** to move through stations and airports.
- **Taking advantage** of curbside check-in at the airport so you don’t have to handle your bags yourself.

Traveling doesn’t always involve airplanes or trains – sometimes an old-fashioned road trip is the ticket to paradise. But whether you’re sitting for hours on planes, trains or automobiles, the mere fact that you’re sitting for long periods requires some forethought to prevent back pain. Dr. Frazier’s tips include:

- **Using a lumbar support pillow** for your lower back, or rolling up a sweater or blanket in a pinch.
- **Using an inflatable travel pillow** around the neck to avoid neck strain while resting or sleeping in a sitting position.
- **Aligning your back** against the back of your seat, keeping shoulders straight and avoiding hunching.
- **Getting up frequently** and moving around. Sitting too long stiffens muscles and places stress on the spine.

Once you reach your destination, you’ll also reach your new (temporary) sleeping spot, which likely involves an unfamiliar mattress. Dr. Frazier offers a simple back-friendly tip for this eventuality.

“While you can’t bring your own mattress along on trips – wouldn’t that be wonderful? – you may be able to pack your own bed pillow,” Dr. Frazier notes. “This is a good idea, since we usually wear in our pillows in such a way that make them most comfortable for us, and familiar to our neck and back.”

### **What to do if back pain flares on vacation**

What if, despite your best efforts, you experience a flare of back or neck pain while traveling? You may not be in your everyday surroundings, but that doesn't mean you can't pack a few things in your "emergency medicine kit" or pop in to a drug store in your locale to make do, Dr. Frazier says. Here's what you might want to have on hand:

- **Cold packs:** If you can't find or store an icy gel pack while traveling, you can fill any type of plastic bag with ice and apply to the painful area for 10-15 minutes at a time.
- **Hot packs:** Similarly, hot packs are widely available and easy to pack. Disposable hot packs heat up after you open them, or use a hot water bottle. Alternating heat and ice on sore backs is ideal.
- **NSAIDs:** Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen or naproxen are widely available over-the-counter and easy to pack. These drugs alleviate back pain and inflammation.
- **Comfortable shoes:** High heels or flip flops may not support your feet and back properly, and should be the first thing to go if your back starts hurting and your trip involves a lot of walking. Pack comfortable, flat shoes or sneakers for best results.

"Being aware of some common mistakes while traveling can help you avoid aggravating any existing back or neck pain or experiencing new discomfort in those areas," Dr. Frazier says. "Everyone wants their vacation to be a relaxing, stress-free time. Often it takes just a few simple back-friendly precautions to make sure that holds true."

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