

Planning a day OUT

Harriet Griffey looks at how to plan a day out when you have arthritis – from deciding where to go and preparing for the day, to pacing yourself

The idea of a day out can create more anxiety than pleasant anticipation when you have arthritis. With a bit of planning and organisation, however, having arthritis should not prevent you from enjoying a day out with family and friends. Enjoying time together can really lift the spirits, and there are many great locations to pick from in the UK.

'My ideal day out would be to visit the Ulster Museum with a friend. I usually plan indoor expeditions because, in Northern Ireland, you can never guarantee the weather and my mobility reduces my walking range,' says 59-year-old Gillian Coward, who has rheumatoid arthritis.

While everyone has different ideas about what works for them, for many people with arthritis it's crucially important to pace activity, allowing enough time to get from place to place without additional stress, and with lots of opportunities to rest and relax in between any activities.

'For me, a good day out would be somewhere we could drive to, with good parking facilities,' says Elizabeth Gillum, 41, who lives in Wales. Osteoarthritis in her knee means continuous pain and difficulty

in walking. 'I'm not very good on steps and stairs. I quite like to walk but need to make sure it's flat and an even surface, otherwise I struggle. We went to Warwick Castle where I could walk some of the way, but couldn't go up to the turrets or down to the cellars.

It wouldn't stop me going but I do have to accept the fact that not everything is accessible. I have to sit out of some of the things the others can do.'

Planning and pacing

Being realistic about what you can manage is key when it comes to planning. 'When I was younger, I did tend to overdo it and that was a bit depressing. But I've learnt to pace myself better now,' says Jonathan Gledhill, 31, from Scotland who has seronegative rheumatoid arthritis.

Make sure you make time to rest before and after the day out. 'It's a shame to miss out if you have limited mobility, so rest beforehand so you're in as best shape as

TOP TIPS FOR PLANNING A DAY OUT

- Research your chosen location online or by phone.
- Advance book any mobility options like a scooter, which may be in limited supply, before you go.
- Don't try to do or see everything – choose one or two galleries in a big museum for instance.
- Avoid having a busy day before your day out, and accept you may need to plan for a quiet day afterwards to recover.
- Discuss beforehand with family/friends what you will be able to manage so they understand any limitations you may have.

possible,' says Elizabeth. Jonathan finds time to relax after an outing: 'The downside after a big day out is that you can feel a bit achy the next day but I find taking a hot bath helps mitigate that.'

Feeling anxious about spoiling a shared day for others may make you feel tempted to decline an invitation. Talking things through with family or friends is crucial when planning a day out if you are to avoid misunderstandings about their expectations and your limitations.

'Once I was with friends in the Lake District during the summer, and friends planned a walk they thought I could manage,' remembers Spencer Ward, 30, who has psoriatic arthritis. 'But it was [p19](#)

HOW TO PLAN A DAY OUT

Gillian Coward, 59, has rheumatoid arthritis

'Footwear is key to having an enjoyable day and also comfortable clothes – light layers rather than a heavy coat, because if you're indoors and have to take it off you'll have to carry it.

I also look at my medication because if I'm going to be driving for a while I adjust my pain relief so that it's effective just as I start walking and it will give me two or three hours coverage.

Double the distances when estimating the time you will spend walking because if you walk somewhere, you're going to have to walk back. I try to choose a venue with plenty of places to sit down so I can take plenty of rest. I carry a fold-up aluminium garden seat in my car in case I need it, but in a museum it's great as there are plenty places to sit.'

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too much. I really struggled and was in a lot of pain all the way, because they had over-estimated what they thought was an easy walk, and I knew I was slowing them down as well. I'm happier if I'm with people who understand my limitations because it can be quite embarrassing to have to explain why I don't feel up to a walk.'

See the top tips for planning a day out and read about Gillian's experience in the boxes.



Cafes and restaurants make it possible to have a bit of a rest, so that you can pace yourself throughout your visit

Where to go

Being proactive and finding places to visit that work for you is made much easier today through the internet. If you don't have access, check out the newly updated edition of *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* – see the further information box.

Check your local paper for listings of local attractions, galleries, museums, tours, theme or wildlife parks, guided walks or places of local interest. Your local council's leisure or social services department should have details about leisure facilities and other initiatives in your area. Many local authorities also provide leisure passes to residents, where pass holders are eligible for discounted rates – this varies throughout the country. Remember that a lot of national museums, as well as other locations, have free entry.

Many locations suitable for a day out combine a number of opportunities, where there are activities to be enjoyed both indoors and outdoors like a lot of National

Trust properties. While there may be a building to explore, there could also be extensive grounds with beautiful gardens, and other attractions, like activities for children. There are usually cafes and restaurants which make it possible to have a bit of a rest, pacing yourself throughout your visit.


Accessibility can be a real issue whilst visiting some attractions so it's always worth checking this out either online or with a phone call. See the boxes – checklist for attractions and further information. Since the Equality Act 2010 it is now unlawful for service providers to discriminate against

CHECKLIST FOR ATTRACTIONS

Check with your chosen attraction before you go:

- the number of stairs
- availability of ramps, level access and handrails
- accessibility of toilets
- the amount of walking from car park/public transport to and around the attraction
- mobility devices available to use or hire
- availability of seating around the venue
- whether there are assistants on hand to help.

someone because of a disability, so that means places open to visitors have to make provision for disabled people. This includes: information about access in different parts of a building and on travel and parking; the assistance provided and what advance notice is required; and which services and events are specifically targeted at disabled people. Disability awareness training is also required for staff to raise awareness of people's different requirements.

A day out is an opportunity to share time with family or friends. The key ingredients to a successful day out when you have arthritis are planning and pacing – helping to make sure that everyone has a good time. 

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain – www.accessibleguide.co.uk

- Book featuring over 180 locations as varied as the National Space Centre in Leicestershire to the Bolderwood Deer Sanctuary in the New Forest National Park. Everything has been checked for both interest and accessibility.
- Priced £6.99 or free to those with a Blue Badge or Disabled Persons Railcard.

To win one of 12 copies of the book send your name and address on a postcard to 'Rough guide' competition by 30 June 2011.

National Trust – www.nationaltrust.org.uk

- National Trust Access Guide.
- Get an Admit One card for free entry for someone who is needed to help you with your mobility. Call 01793 817634.

Tourism for All – www.tourismforall.org.uk

- Helpline – 0845 124 9971.

RADAR – www.radar.org.uk

- The Leisure Time: Days Out guide. Priced £5 plus £2 postage.
- The National Key Scheme provides access to over 8,000 locked public toilets around the country.

Changing Places – www.changing-places.org

- Find accessible toilets across the UK.

Other useful websites:

- www.goodaccessdaysout.co.uk
- www.english-heritage.org.uk
- www.disabledgo.com
- www.directenquiries.com

SCOOTER FREEDOM

Jan Millington, 67, has rheumatoid arthritis

'I had a fantastic day out last year with all the four grandchildren to Alnwick Gardens. It took about an hour to get there in the car. We had been online beforehand to see how accessible the venue was, and it said we could hire a scooter, so I did that. If you don't book in advance you could be disappointed and struggle without.

I prefer a scooter to a wheelchair because it means I'm more independent and don't have to rely on someone to push me. I don't have to keep telling people what I want to see and do. I do get tired after a day out so I wouldn't arrange two days out one after the other – I'd have to rest in between.'