myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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Wellness Wednesdays

SEPTEMBER, 2025 WEEK 1

FALL TRAVEL AND MUSCULOSKELETAL HEALTH: What Are Musculoskeletal Disorders?

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are conditions that affect the muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments. Over 1.71 billion people in the world have conditions like these, and they're the leading contributor to disability worldwide. Common examples include back pain, tendonitis, sprains, arthritis and joint stiffness. These issues often develop over time due to poor posture, repetitive movements, or improper lifting techniques, but can also result from sudden injuries.

As the weather cools and we prepare for seasonal activities, it's important to stay ahead of musculoskeletal strain. With the right precautions, you can prevent aches and keep your body moving comfortably.

How Travel Effects the Body

During a weekend trip or a longer vacation, travel can put added stress on the body, especially the lower back and neck. Research shows people with occupations involving long hours behind the wheel – like taxi drivers, delivery workers, etc. – suffer from neck and back pain in higher numbers than those who don't.

Sitting for long periods in cars, planes or trains can cause the muscles in your back and hips to tighten. Carrying heavy bags, slouching in your seat or skipping regular movement breaks can also contribute to pain.

The good news? With a little preparation and awareness, fall travel can stay comfortable and low-impact.

Protect Your Back While on the Go

Make the most out of the crisp fall weather and changing leaves with these easy tips:

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Get Ready to Enroll!

Cook County Annual Employee Open Enrollment will take place Tuesday, October 14 – Friday, October 31, 11:59 p.m.

Pro Tip: Get a head start by reviewing your current benefit selections in ESS. Know what you have now, so you know what you need in 2026.

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❶ Start with good posture

Sit upright with your back supported and your feet flat on the floor. If you're in a car, adjust the seat so your knees are level with, or slightly below, your hips. A small pillow or rolled-up towel behind your lower back can add extra support.

❷ Take movement breaks

On road trips, try to stop every hour or two to stretch your legs and loosen tight muscles. Even a quick walk around a rest area or a few gentle stretches can help.

❸ Use proper lifting techniques

When loading luggage or supplies, bend at your knees, not your waist, and keep the object close to your body. Avoid twisting while lifting and ask for help with anything heavy or awkward.

❹ Pack light and use rolling luggage

Try to minimize what you carry to reduce strain. Rolling suitcases and backpacks with padded straps help distribute weight more evenly and reduce pressure on your joints.

❺ Stretch before and after you travel

Take a few minutes to warm up your body before a long trip. Gentle stretches can prepare your muscles and help prevent stiffness. After you arrive at your destination, stretch again to relieve tightness from sitting.

Listen to Your Body

Pain is your body's way of signaling that something is off. Don't ignore recurring aches, especially in the lower back, neck or joints. Early attention can help prevent more serious problems later. Talk to your healthcare provider if:

- Pain keeps you from daily activities
- You experience tingling, numbness, or weakness
- Symptoms don't improve with rest or movement

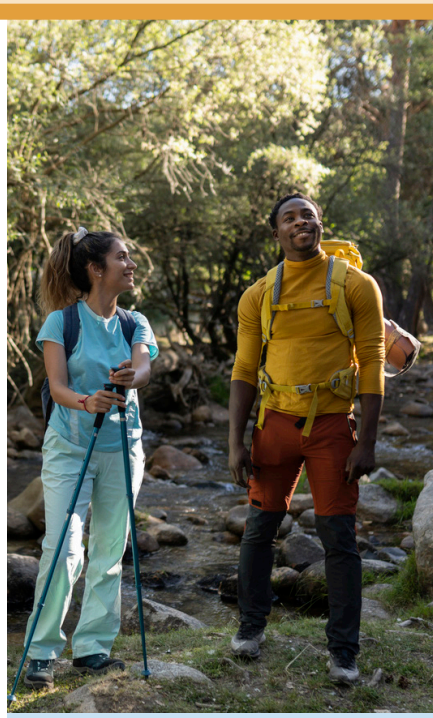
Check in with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) if you are experiencing any of the above. Need help finding one? Call the **Health Advocate number on your BCBSIL member ID card** or log in to **Blue Access for Members℠ (BAM℠)** at **bcbsil.com** and use the Find Care tool to locate in-network care.

CLICK OR TAP! Know that help isn't far away. **BCBSIL Resources** can help you access:

- Physical therapy referrals
- Preventive screenings
- Fitness programs
- Virtual care options for muscle and joint concerns

Fall may bring cooler weather and longer nights, but with a few smart habits, your body can stay strong and pain-free all season long.

SOURCES: *World Health Organization*, *Pickard et.al via NIH*



Smart Choices for More Strength

Muscle and joint health are a year-round priority, but fall is a great time to check in with your body and adjust your daily routine.

Stay active with gentle movement like walking, yoga, or stretching

Set reminders to check your posture during the workday

Strengthen your core to support your spine and balance

Wear supportive shoes that cushion your steps

If you spend a lot of time working at a desk, consider your workstation setup. Keeping your screen at eye level, elbows at a 90-degree angle and feet flat on the floor can help reduce tension.

Share this article with your colleagues so they too can travel safely!