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How to use that commuting time in the car to feel better rather than worse

For commuters, sometimes getting from Point A to Point B is easier said than done.

Whether you're spending more time in the car because of the Sherman Minton Bridge closure or other reasons, here are some suggestions to help you cope.

Forgive yourself: "People shouldn't judge themselves if they feel moments of road rage because we all do — given the right circumstances," said Darrin Zeer, a Denver-based motivational speaker who's written books on relaxation and coping with the frustrations of travel and busy life. "When you've got to commute an extra hour, it just builds on the frustration."

Define the benefits: Figuring out what makes the commute worth it — such as the people you work with, the job itself, a good salary or being able to live in a desirable area — might help, said Eli Karam, a marriage and family therapist based at the University of Louisville's Kent School of Social Work.

If commuting is "something you dread every day, obviously, it's going to deflate you," Karam said, so "find some way to

own it, to make it feel like there's something worthwhile."

Take it easy: "It's important when you're driving just not to sweat the small stuff," Zeer said. "Almost try and consider it a break" and decide, "Hey, I want to arrive at work or arrive home feeling good rather than feeling horrible."

Some people look forward to "a nice, quiet ride home, not having to talk to anyone, not having to deal with anything, said Karam, an assistant professor. "It's their little private space."

Create a pleasant environment: Play music, listen to an audio book, or ride in silence, Zeer said. You could "make it a very Zen experience."

Sing: Enjoy imitating your favorite vocalist, or "if you just need to get downright primal, just growl or scream," Zeer said. "Definitely, let that road rage and tension go."

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Be productive — maybe: Some people like to use commuting time to discuss logistics with their spouse or other people, or to touch base with people they might not have time to call later, Karam said.

Others will use it as a time to go through a mental checklist of things to do and how to accomplish them, he said.

Beware of relationship discussions: If you commute with a spouse, consider this: “Sometimes couples have some of their worst fights in the car because you’re confined; you can’t get away,” said Karam, president elect of the Kentucky Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. “You can have conversations about logistics ... but a real heart-to-heart status-of-the-relationship talk, you should not be having in a car or in a confined space like that.”

Move a little: Anytime you stay in one position for an extended period, your muscles will tend to get stiff, said Chad Garvey, a physical therapist with the Kentucky Orthopedic Rehab Team (KORT) in Jeffersontown. For people who have long commutes, Garvey suggests gentle stretching moves. “Try to keep it as uncomplicated as you can” to maintain focus on the road, he said.

Zeer, whose books include “Travel Yoga: Stretches for Planes, Trains, Automobiles, and More!” (Chronicle Books, 2005), suggests head rolls and shoulder rolls.

Josh Bowen, quality control director of personal training for Urban Active fitness

centers, said options for exercising in the car are limited, but you could ask a fitness professional about moves to engage your core muscles and about rotator-cuff exercises.

Report persistent pain: People who spend a lot of time behind the wheel sometimes develop medical issues, such as back, neck and shoulder pain, Garvey said. “If you’re noticing pain for longer than a week associated with driving, perhaps a consultation with your doctor or physical therapist would be helpful,” he said.

BOOKS, APPS AND MORE

“Travel Yoga: Stretches for Planes, Trains, Automobiles, and More!” (Chronicle Books, 2005) by Darrin Zeer. Find details about a companion cellphone application called Travel Yoga at <http://bit.ly/o2A522>.

“Travel Yoga 3D in the Car” (lite and full versions) by New Justice Films. These cellphone applications use 3D animated

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figures to illustrate yoga exercises that can be done while seated. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/ozIR9A>.

“Commuter Zone” is a CD of guided relaxation for commuters. You can listen to excerpts at www.commuterzone.info.

“Drive Yourself to Fitness” is a 2006 column from The Washington Post that describes some car exercises. <http://wapo.st/oXZhcV>.

The Kentucky Orthopedic Rehab Team has a new app called “KORT Simple Stretches for Strength & Mobility.” You might be able to do some of the moves in your car. Find a link to it at www.kort.com.

STAY FOCUSED

The State Office of Highway Safety discourages distracted driving. Kentucky’s texting law bans texting for all drivers while the vehicle is in motion.

For drivers under 18, use of all personal communication devices, such as cell phones and pagers, is prohibited while the vehicle is in motion.

For more information, highwaysafety.ky.gov.

Source: Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

EN ROUTE EXERCISES

Light stretching can help ease stiffness on long car rides, some physical therapists say. Here are a couple that airline travelers use that you might be able to do when you’re at a standstill. Don’t do anything that would inhibit your ability to drive or focus on the road.

Shoulder rolls: Raise your shoulders and then move them forward, downward and then backward in a smooth circular movement.

Neck roll: Relax your shoulders, let your head drop to your right shoulder and roll your head slowly to the front and then to your left side. Repeat five times.

Source: Exercise descriptions from the American Council on Exercise website; adapted for this use.

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