

Have a Healthier Holiday: Travel Tips

Feel your best during the busiest travel season of the year.

Too often, a holiday trip evokes scenes of planes, trains and automobiles jammed with sneezing, coughing passengers. Want to avoid the “gift” that keeps on giving – the flu, cold or stomach bug? Fortify yourself with the healthy travel tips below. Your immune system will thank you.

Know before you go

“One in three people come into my office with an upper respiratory infection after a long flight,” says [Dr. E. Robert Schwartz](#). Dr. Schwartz specializes in family medicine at the University of Miami Health System. Before traveling, he recommends boosting your immunity by getting more sleep, exercising, eating more [fruits and vegetables](#), “especially broccoli and leafy greens” and taking probiotics.

If your health habits are more naughty than nice, do not overcompensate with vitamins. “Some people mistakenly believe that ‘more is better’ with vitamins. Read the ingredients on the bottle. Different supplements may contain the same vitamins, which means you are overdosing,” Dr. Schwartz explains.

It is the most wonderful time of the year – unless you come down with the flu. As if taking a cue from the Grinch, flu season often coincides with the holidays, when you stress more, sleep less and find yourself in crowds. Though complications from the vaccine are usually minor, if you get a flu shot, do so 10 days to two weeks before traveling. And remember, “The flu vaccine doesn’t protect you from the common cold,” says Dr. Schwartz.

Difficult as it may be to ditch travel plans, there are times when you should stay home. “Avoid traveling if you have a productive cough, green or yellow mucus, a stuffy nose or fever. This is especially true if you’re flying because blocked Eustachian tubes can cause severe ear pain,” says Dr. Schwartz.



If you tend to get [motion sickness](#), consider a scopolamine patch. Available with a doctor’s prescription, you place the patch behind your ear 24 hours before traveling. Over-the-counter options such as Sea-Band bracelets work for some people. Others prefer Dramamine or Bonine, though they can cause drowsiness.

Keep your medications handy

If you have heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) or gastrointestinal problems, keep your medications or medical devices with you at all times. People with [gastrointestinal](#) issues should locate bathrooms and rest areas before traveling.

Compression support stockings may not make the "Best Dressed" list, but they could save your life if you have arterial fibrillation (AFib), liver disease or take birth control pills. “Deep vein thrombosis can occur at any age when you sit or lie down for long periods,” Dr. Schwartz says. To lower your risk of blood clots, drink plenty of water, wear support stockings and move every 30 to 40 minutes. If you can’t move easily on a crowded plane, stretch, flex and rotate your feet under the seat in front of you every 15 to 20 minutes. “This creates blood flow in the venous system where clots occur,” says Dr. Schwartz.

No magic bullet

In your holiday-harried state, you might believe a pill can offset overindulgence, overscheduling and sleep deprivation. According to Dr. Schwartz, there is “no scientific evidence” showing that immune boosters and cold and flu remedies actually work. If you plan to take an herbal remedy and also take prescription medication, ask your doctor or pharmacist if there are contraindications. “Certain antibiotics and blood thinner medications conflict with herbal supplements,” says Dr. Schwartz.

To vent or not to vent

Some doctors believe that keeping your air vent open on a plane pushes germs away from your face to your feet. Dr. Schwartz disagrees. “Constantly blowing air dries out your mucus membranes, making them more susceptible to germs.” He advises travelers at risk for upper respiratory problems to wear a HEPA filter mask instead.

Keep calm and travel on

Avoiding illness on a trip is as much about what you do as what you don’t do. Do stay hydrated, get enough sleep, wash your hands frequently and limit alcohol and cigarette use. Keeping calm also helps. “Travel invokes anxiety for many reasons – from worrying about terrorism to losing your passport. To manage anxiety, use ‘anticipatory guidance’. When you can’t avoid crowds, be observant of your surroundings. Make copies of your passport. Store your boarding pass in your smartphone, know where your keys and cash are before leaving home and always return them to the same place,” says Dr. Schwartz.

Traveling over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house or beyond doesn’t have to make you sick. Practice prevention and give yourself the gift of health this holiday season.

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[Minimize the Misery of Jet Lag](#)

[Travel Tips for Diabetics](#)