

Putting the Brakes on Motion Sickness

Ways to beat that queasy feeling - from a “thumbs up” to light bites.

Planes, trains, and automobiles - they all make us sick. Boats, too.

Some people are more prone to motion sickness. Especially children. But even astronauts and sailors can fall prey to its effects given the right - or wrong - circumstances. In fact, it was the seafaring Greeks who gave us the word nausea, from their word for ship.

As Sir Isaac Newton might have put it, “A body in motion tends to throw up.”

The cause, though, remains a mystery. “The going theory is that there is a mismatch between what your body feels and what the eye sees.” says Dr. Michael Hoffer, renowned otolaryngologist at the University of Miami Health System.

Avoiding the queasiness and vomiting caused by motion sickness doesn't have to condemn a person to a life without travel. There are a number of ways to prevent, or at least lessen, the effects.

PHYSICAL THERAPY

Since motion sickness seems to be caused by a disconnect between the eyes and the inner ear, getting what you see and feel back in sync can work.

Looking out at the horizon helps the eyes see that your body is in motion, even if you're sitting still. If you're on a ship, head for an upper deck, then let yourself enjoy

that romantic sunset. Looking out and ahead in a car has a similar effect.

Other tricks include what Dr. Hoffer calls “Museum Gaze.”

On a big ship, he says, you can walk down a hall casting looks back over one shoulder for a few feet, then over the other, focusing on something on the wall as you go – as if you’re walking through a museum looking at pictures.

“If you do that for 40 feet, and you do it four or five times, that can help your body get in sync.”

Of course, that won’t work in a car. But giving yourself a thumbs-up might:

“Take your thumb and put it about 12 to 18 inches in front of you and stare at the thumb,” Dr. Hoffer says, “and you’ll be much less motion sick.”

CHEW THERAPY

Eating some ginger or peppermint, or even just chewing gum helps some people. So does putting a little something in your stomach. Dr. Hoffer says eat light, a piece of toast or something, even after you start feeling sick. You don’t want your stomach full or empty.

And, he says, avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages.

PILLS AND PATCHES

Of course, if you know you or someone you care about is susceptible to motion sickness, you can prepare in advance. Some of the most common means for combating motion sickness include drugs such as scopolamine and Dramamine, taken as a pill or via a transdermal patch. The various drugs usually have to be taken several hours in advance. And, they all have side effects ranging from dry

mouth and drowsiness to blurred vision and disorientation.

“If all else fails,” Dr. Hoffer says, “Valium will knock you out and it will solve the motion sickness because you're going to be asleep. Of course, this therapy must be prescribed by your physician.”