

Smart ways to live well

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# Happy, Healthy Travels

Exactly what to do to avoid common vacation pitfalls and feel great on your next getaway

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One of the perks of getting older is that you finally have more time to see the world. But while a weeklong vacation is rejuvenating, it can also take a toll on your body. "Changing your routine ramps up levels of stress hormones, which can wreak havoc on your immune system and disrupt your sleep," says Steven Lamm, MD, a clinical assistant professor at New York University. "There's a price you pay for travel." The good news: With careful planning you can avoid the most common health pitfalls travelers face.

### Prevent Back Pain

**Before you go:** Ship your luggage to your destination in advance. Save time--and your spine--by going to [www.luggagefree.com](http://www.luggagefree.com) and scheduling a pickup. Your bags can be delivered within 24 hours in the United States. Added perk: On most trips you can include your liquid toiletries without worrying about them being confiscated from your carry-on. (If you send your stuff a few days ahead, the rate will be less expensive--as low as \$1.65 per pound for domestic shipping.)

**En route:** Get out of your seat every hour to stretch your legs and walk around the cabin, suggests Arya Nick Shamie, MD, assistant professor of spine surgery at UCLA. Angle overhead vents away from you: Cool air can stiffen your neck and shoulder muscles, says Steven Conway, DC, spokesman for the American Chiropractic Association.

**On arrival:** If you end up with a too-soft hotel bed, ask if someone can slide a board under the mattress for more support, says Shamie. "Hotels may have orthopedic pillows for people who ask for them," he adds.

### Soothe Your Stomach

**Before you go:** Take the right [probiotics](#)--healthy bacteria found in food or supplements--which may help reduce gas, bloating, and diarrhea. A study in the British Medical Journal found that people taking certain [probiotics](#) had fewer diarrhea symptoms after 3 days than those who didn't take them. Get your dose in pill form, Lamm suggests. "One capsule of the brand Culturelle has about 10 times more [probiotics](#) than fortified foods." Start popping supplements a few days before your trip.

**En route:** Bring CharcoCaps, activated charcoal tablets that you can swallow before takeoff to help absorb gas, suggests gastroenterologist Patricia Raymond, MD. All that gum chewing and candy sucking you do to relieve pressure in your ears may cause "jet bloat," and the higher the altitude, the more the gas in your body expands.

**On arrival:** Drink plenty of [water](#) and consume about 25 g of [fiber](#) daily to keep things running smoothly. Experts say that the [fiber](#) found in wheat and oat brans is better at relieving constipation than [fiber](#) from fruits and veggies.

### Beat Jet Lag

**Before you go:** Pack [melatonin](#) supplements. Your body produces [melatonin](#) on its own, but if you're traveling, your internal clock may get thrown off. In a 2006 study from the journal *Sleep*, researchers found

that people who took as little as 0.3 mg of [melatonin](#) got about a half hour more snooze time.

**En route:** Reset your watch to the destination's time as soon as you board the plane, says Lamm--and if you're scheduled to arrive in the morning, try to sleep during the flight. If necessary, talk with your doctor about a prescription sleep aid, such as Ambien.

**On arrival:** Traveling east is harder on the body, but it helps to get out in the sun in the morning. Bright light perks you up and allows your body to adjust to the new schedule, says Lamm.

### Fend Off Weight Gain

**Before you go:** Skip flats or sandals--lack of arch support can lead to heel [pain](#) and keep you sidelined. Instead, bring shoes with thick, well-cushioned soles. Visit the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine's Web site ([aapasm.org/walkingshoes.html](http://aapasm.org/walkingshoes.html)) for a list of recommended brands.

**En route:** Drink a glass of [water](#) before you stop at the food court or accept the free cookies on the plane, says Joanne Lichten, PhD, RD, author of *How to Stay Healthy & Fit on the Road*. Because you're prone to dehydration when traveling, your craving may pass once you quench your thirst.

**On arrival:** Get acquainted with a city by seeing it on foot. At certain Hilton hotels, you can request a treadmill in your room. (Visit [inroomfitness.com](http://inroomfitness.com) to find participating locations.) And at some Westin hotels, Pilates videos, dumbbells, and core-training equipment are available for room workouts.

### Fight Off New Germs

**Before you go:** "Everyone over age 50 should get the flu vaccine," says David Goldberg, MD, editor in chief of MDtravelhealth.com in Scarsdale, NY. "And it's an especially good idea for travelers." To see if there's a flu outbreak where you're headed, visit [weather.com](http://weather.com) and click on Healthy Living.

**En route:** Avoid [coffee](#) and sip some warm green or black [tea](#) with lemon, recommends Murray Grossan, MD, an ear, nose, and throat doctor in Los Angeles. It's especially high in helpful [antioxidants](#). Plus, it keeps you hydrated: A study published in the *Journal of Environmental Health Research* found that dry airplane air increases your risk of getting a case of the sniffles. A thin layer of mucus in your nose and throat normally flushes out bacteria and viruses, but when air is dry, this lining gets parched, leaving you vulnerable to infection. Nasal sprays and gels, such as Breathe.ease XL Nasal Moisturizing Gel, can also help.

**On arrival:** Wash your hands frequently. Recently, researchers from the University of Virginia Health System found that hotel rooms were teeming with germs. It's hard to avoid cold viruses on remote controls and light switches--so send them down the drain before they ruin your good time.

### 3 Healthy Travel Sites

Where to click for info on vaccinations, emergency contacts, and more:

<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>

Visit the CDC's travel page to see what vaccines you need, and for travel notices and other worldwide health tips.

<https://travelregistration.state.gov>

If you're headed overseas, register with the State Department so you can be reached in case of an emergency.

<http://usembassy.state.gov>

Should you need a doc while vacationing abroad, go to the Web site of the US embassy or consulate for the country you're in.

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