

## Health tips for the traveler

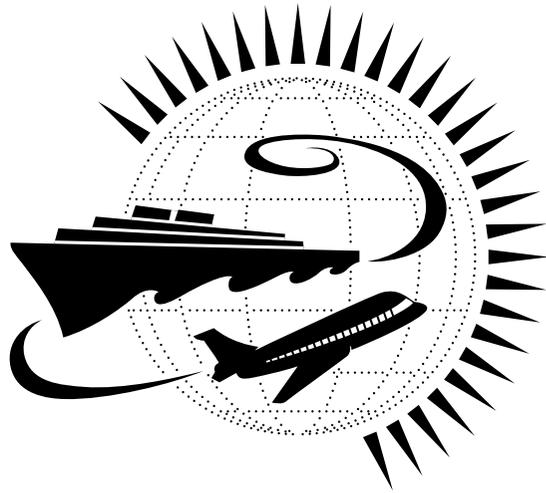
Here are some items you might want to bring, depending on the type of trip you're taking, and some precautions once your journey is under way.

### On every trip . . .

- Bring an extra supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication that you take regularly. Pack some of your supplies in separate luggage just in case a piece is lost. If you require needles for medication, be sure to bring enough of these also. Carry some of your supplies and a written prescription for drugs and needles in carry-on luggage.
- Remember to pack an extra pair of eyeglasses.
- Bring the addresses and phone numbers of your doctor and dentist.
- Don't forget a standard first-aid kit, with adhesive tape and bandages, sterile cotton, tweezers, small scissors, an elastic bandage, and a thermometer. Also bring an antiseptic, an antifungal preparation, sunscreen, petroleum jelly, aloe lotion for sunburn, a pain reliever (aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen), a medication for motion sickness, and vitamins.
- You may need calamine lotion, hydrocortisone cream, witch hazel, or some other preparation to relieve bug bites.

### Don't get "bugged" by insects

- Bring an insect repellent with a DEET concentration no stronger than 35%. Follow the directions carefully.
- Wear clothing that covers as much of your skin as possible, and stay indoors from dusk to dawn.
- Use bed nets impregnated with permethrin, and consider soaking your clothes in a 1% solution of this insecticide and letting them dry.
- If you are going to an area where malaria is a danger, make sure you tell your doctor so that you can get the appropriate medication. Be sure you understand the directions. If you are traveling with someone else, distribute the medication in different pieces of luggage.



### Don't drink the water

- In some developing countries, tap water is unsafe to drink. In fact, *only* boiled water, coffee or tea, beer, wine, bottled water, and carbonated beverages are safe in many areas. Wipe the tops of cans and bottles before you open them. If possible, open the container yourself, or watch someone else do it.
- Don't use tap water to brush your teeth.
- Avoid swallowing water when you shower or swim.
- Boil water for 5 minutes to disinfect it. If you can't do that, use iodine tablets to disinfect it. Chlorine does not disinfect as well as iodine. Water filters have not been proven effective.

### Watch what you eat

- Avoid shellfish, raw meat, and unpasteurized milk and dairy products.
- Don't eat salads or uncooked vegetables and fruits. A fruit that you peel yourself—a banana or an orange—is safe.
- Fish caught in the coral reefs of the West Indies, tropical Pacific, and Indian Oceans may carry toxins, even when thoroughly cooked. Most of these

## Health tips for the traveler *continued*

fish are probably safe to eat much of the time, although puffer fish and barracuda are best avoided at all times.

### Avoid traveler's diarrhea

The precautions you take with food and water may help you avoid getting traveler's diarrhea.

- Bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)—30 mL 4 times a day or 2 to 4 tablets 4 times a day—helps some people avoid diarrhea when they also watch what they eat and drink. Don't use this medication for more than 3 weeks.
- If you do get diarrhea, an oral rehydration solution helps replace the fluids and salts that your body loses with frequent, loose bowel movements. Buy some solution or a mix at a pharmacy, or combine 12 oz of boiled water with ¼ tsp of baking soda, ½ tsp of sugar, and a pinch or two of a table salt or table-salt substitute that contains potassium chloride. Alternate with canned, bottled, or boiled fruit juices or sugar-free soft drinks.
- You can use bismuth subsalicylate to reduce

the frequency of bowel movements. Take 30 mL of liquid or 2 tablets every 30 minutes for up to 8 doses. Loperamide (Imodium A-D) is an alternative. Or, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic for you to take in case you get diarrhea.

- Some physicians advocate antibiotics to prevent traveler's diarrhea despite the potential side effects of these agents and the risk of bacterial resistance. Talk to your doctor about whether taking antibiotics to prevent diarrhea is an option.
- Get specific directions from your doctor before you leave about what to do if your child or infant traveling with you gets diarrhea. This can be a life-threatening condition in young children—and in very old people. Be prepared!

### Cautions for contact-lens wearers

If you use contact lenses—either disposable or those you remove at bedtime—be sure to take a topical ocular antibiotic medication along with ocular lubricants. Early and immediate treatment of bacterial eye infections helps avoid serious vision problems later on.

### Online resources for you

The World Wide Web is a great resource for travel information. If you have access, be sure to look at some of these sites before you depart.

#### *The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel> contains information on vaccines and ways to avoid illness, as well as maps indicating the frequency of infections in specific countries.

#### *The State Department Travel Page*

<http://travel.state.gov> focuses on areas of high crime and political unrest. It also gives safety information and tips on local laws and customs.

