

A Survival Guide to Healthy Travel

Hit the highway, skyway or train tracks in good spirits with the tools to treat pesky pain and health problems

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WITH SUMMER BREAK ON THE HORIZON, chances are that you're planning a family getaway, whether you're road warriors with grandparents to see or frequent fliers with far-flung destinations in mind. As with flat tires or flight delays, nobody plans for a trip to include minor ailments or injuries, but knowing how to treat them could get you back to enjoying your trip that much faster.



EAR PAIN

Ow! Changes in airplane cabin pressure throw off the balance of pressure between our outer and middle ears. Normally, it's equalized when air flows into our eustachian tubes, which run between the middle ear and the back of the throat, but infections, irritants or colds can leave those already-narrow tubes swollen and clogged, making relief difficult.

What to do now: If a good yawn or sucking on hard candy doesn't work, squeeze the nostrils closed, then exhale against a closed mouth—gently, and for no more than a second or two. Use decongestant nasal sprays to help keep ear and nasal passages clear; acetaminophen or ibuprofen may help relieve pain. Give babies a pacifier or bottle, making sure they sit upright if drinking.

SPRAINED ANKLE

Falls and spills while hiking, running or walking can knock a joint out of place, which makes the supporting ligaments stretch too far.

What to do now: Start with RICE—rest, ice, compression and elevation. Don't put weight on your ankle; ice it for 20 to 30 minutes, three or four times a day, to keep swelling down; wrap with firm bandages to immobilize and support; and elevate above your heart as often as possible for 48 hours. Swelling and pain after a minor ankle sprain usually last two to three days, but complete healing takes four to six weeks. If pain is severe, see a doctor to check for broken bones or more severe sprains.

LOWER BACK PAIN

Sadly, back pain will happen to four out of five of us eventually, whether we're traveling or not. It can be triggered by such basic things as sleeping in a different bed, or excessive walking and standing.

What to do now: Most back pain will resolve itself with simple treatment. Relieve pain and inflammation with ice or heat and an over-the-counter medication such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen; at night, sleep in a fetal position with a pillow

between your knees. While you should avoid physical activity for a few days, resume normal activity soon thereafter. But be slow and controlled, especially when bending. If you feel weak or feverish, or lose control of your bladder or bowels, a more serious problem may be causing your pain.

FOOD POISONING AND DIARRHEA

Maybe it was the water—or improperly washed or cooked food—that caused your abdominal cramps, gas, diarrhea, nausea or even fever. Although symptoms should pass in a few days, they put a damper on travel.

Don't Put Junk in Your Trunk!

YOU PROBABLY HAVE JUMPER CABLES IN THE BACK OF YOUR VEHICLE in case of a dead battery. That's a good start—get it?—but the American Red Cross suggests a few more items to round out an emergency car kit that can help keep your family healthy and safe if there's an auto problem. Gather the items now and check their condition every six months. (Mark your calendar with a reminder in September, which is National Preparedness Month, and follow up next March.)

- ❑ Battery-powered radio and spare batteries
- ❑ Flashlight and spare batteries
- ❑ Blanket
- ❑ Jumper cables
- ❑ 5-pound fire extinguisher
- ❑ Bottled water and high-energy foods that will stay fresh for a long time, such as granola bars and raisins
- ❑ Maps
- ❑ Shovel, in snowy climates
- ❑ Tire repair kit and pump
- ❑ Flares



FREE HEALTH PLANNER, TAILORED TO YOUR TRIP



The International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers lets members create a custom travel health planner for trips anywhere from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. In addition to country-specific advice about immunizations, disease risks, and food and water safety, it also includes directories of local physicians. Go to iamat.org.

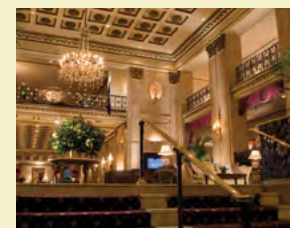
What to do now: Doctors usually won't prescribe antibiotics, since they can make certain types of food poisoning worse. Focus on replenishing fluids and electrolytes. Until diarrhea slows, stay shy of solid foods and dairy products. Antidiarrheal products such as Pepto-Bismol are safe only for those 13 and older. Activated charcoal tablets may alleviate some symptoms by absorbing certain toxins.

SPIDER BITES

Mosquito bites are annoying, sure, but spider bites tend to be downright painful, and may become larger and redder over several days.

What to do now: No pill or potion will speed up healing, so aim to minimize discomfort. Applying a cold compress for 15 to 20 minutes each hour for six hours and elevating the area may minimize swelling. Knock out the urge to scratch by using oral antihistamines such as Benadryl, topical treatments such as calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream, or anesthetic sprays. Prevent infection in a larger bite by washing it and applying hydrogen peroxide, then an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment two or three times a day. The bite of a poisonous spider (black widow or brown recluse) may lead to nausea, vomiting, rash and fever. If you think the bite is poisonous, elevate the area and tie a bandage snugly to prevent spread of the venom—but not so tightly that circulation is cut off. Then seek emergency medical care.

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