

TRAVEL TIPS

Education and planning are the key to a successful and healthy trip.

Travelling can bring much joy and satisfaction to our lives. However, good planning is very important to ensure all aspects of the trip run smoothly.

Part of this preparation is to develop an awareness of the differences in healthcare services in the country you are visiting and to be aware of what precautions to take before travelling there. It's important to have the answers to questions like: What happens if I run out of medication while travelling? Can I buy my medications over the counter or do I have to see a doctor? What immunization shots do I need before travelling? How long before I go should I get the vaccines to allow them to reach maximum potency for my trip? Any health dangers while I'm at my destination (water, food)?

Immunization

Hepatitis A and B infections can be a concern in many developing and some developed countries. Hepatitis A can result from consuming contaminated food or water. There is a hepatitis A vaccine available that is very effective. It's good insurance to have! Hepatitis A vaccine takes about one month for full protection to occur. One booster dose 6-12 months later is advised. So plan well in advance.

Be aware of the water you drink and the food you eat. Depending on the type of accommodations you choose, there may be a filtered water supply in the hotel or resort. Get assurance that this is so and check the ice cubes as well to ensure they are safe. Bottled water is often supplied in hotel rooms. Use it to brush your teeth if you are unsure of the water.

Hepatitis B can be contracted through contact with blood and bodily fluids of an infected person, unprotected sex and sharing needles and syringes with infected persons. Hepatitis B is a very serious illness and can develop into cirrhosis and/or cancer of the liver. There is a vaccine available that combines both Hepatitis A & B treatments in one shot. The first dose is administered then a second dose one month later followed by a third dose six months after the first dose. Again, planning ahead is important.

Depending on your destination, other vaccinations may be needed. Check with Health Canada's website, a local travel clinic or your Medicine Centre pharmacist for more information.

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Plane Travel

Here are a few ways of reducing the stress of air travel:

- If you are prone to being air sick, choose a seat by the wing.
- Carry your medication with you in your carry-on baggage.
- Do wash your hands often during the trip. Hand wipes and sanitizer liquids are useful.
- To help reduce jet lag, eat lightly, drink plenty of water and juices and limit coffee and tea and avoid alcohol in-flight and for 24 hours before the flight.
- During long flights, get up and walk around every couple of hours. Stretch your legs and move your ankles around in a circle for a few minutes to stimulate blood flow and discourage blood clots or deep vein thrombosis. Wearing good support stockings is a very good idea on long flights especially if you have a history of heart disease or stroke.
- Not sleeping during take-off and landing and chewing gum will help keep ear pressure equalized. Taking a decongestant containing the drug pseudoephedrine an hour before you get on the plane will also help prevent plugged ears. If you are travelling with a baby, give the baby a soother or bottle to suck on during take-off and landing.
- To reduce the chance of jet lag, for two to three days before a long flight, go to bed one hour earlier every night. Melatonin is a hormone that occurs naturally in our bodies. Supplementing with 3mg between 2 am and 3am in the destination time zone for 3 days before and for 4 days at bedtime after arriving may help reduce jetlag. Your Medicine Centre pharmacist can help you with this.
- Schedule outdoor activities right after your arrival to help reset your body clock.

MEDICAL INSURANCE:

Make sure you have it! Costs of hospital care in other countries can be thousands of dollars per day. If you have a chronic disease, have a Medic-Alert bracelet or pendant. This will aid caregivers giving you help if you have a problem. Patients with diabetes, heart or lung problems, epilepsy are particularly advised to use Medic-Alert. Our Medicine Centre pharmacists can advise you about this service.

MEDICINES IN OTHER COUNTRIES:

Rules regarding the sale of medications vary from country to country. Many medications that are on prescription in Canada are sold over-the-counter in other countries. There are huge counterfeit drug operations worldwide so it is never certain what you are getting. The best advice is to bring with you all the medications you need for the time you are away. In Canada, the source of the medications you buy at your pharmacy is very reliable. Also, bring an extra few days' supply in case of a travel delay.

If the country you are visiting has a mosquito problem, don't forget to bring some insect repellent containing DEET, the best repellent.

TRAVEL FIRST-AID KIT:

It's a good idea to carry a small first-aid kit with you on your trip. Besides your prescribed medications, carry an anti-diarrhea and anti-nausea medication. A product containing loperamide is the most common. Also pack some medications for cold symptoms, pain and allergies. Antibiotic ointment, or some hydrocortisone cream, can be useful for minor infections, rashes and even sunburn.

Avoid sunburn by applying sunscreen regularly throughout the day. An SPF 30 product and above is best. Make sure your sunscreen is not outdated. It's also a good idea to have an extra pair of glasses in case your main pair gets lost or broken.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHEA:

This is the most common cause of infection for people travelling out of Canada. At least one third of travelers will contract this potentially serious problem. Prevention and education is the key. Treatment usually consists of drinking lots of fluid to avoid dehydration. Take oral rehydrating fluids that contain sugar and salt. Those sports drinks like Gatorade can also be used. One other tip that can't be emphasized enough is to wash your hands regularly. This is especially important if you are near someone who has diarrhea already.

SUMMARY:

It takes just one illness or mishap to spoil an otherwise great holiday. Planning ahead and taking a few simple precautions will help you remain healthy to enjoy your holiday to the fullest.

Our Medicine Centre pharmacists are very knowledgeable about travel vaccines, medications, sunscreens and other types of medication you may need on your trip. They will be happy to advise you!

HAPPY VACATION!!