

- [Travel Discount Center](#)
- [Phone Numbers](#)
- [Links](#)

[Home](#) > [News & Advice](#) > Five Health and Wellness Tips for Holiday Travel

Five Health and Wellness Tips for Holiday Travel

by *Sarah Pascarella, SmarterTravel Staff* - November 5, 2010

[comments \(5\)](#)

| [recommend](#)

[Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Share](#) [RSS](#)



The holidays are approaching, and the skies and roads will be packed with travelers making the annual sojourn to see friends and family. Naturally, this time coincides with the winter cold-and-flu season, and with more people out and about than ever, your chances of being exposed to germs goes way up.

In terms of health and wellness, "heading out to travel can really be summed up into two [goals]," says David R. Shlim, MD, and an executive board member on the [International Society of Travel Medicine](#). "Prevent what's preventable and cope with what's not."

- [Flights](#)
- [Vacation Packages](#)
- [Hotels](#)
- [Car Rentals](#)
- [Cruise](#)

Find Cheap Flights

From

To

Depart:

Return:

Travelers:

[GO ▶](#)

If you're traveling this holiday season, take heart: With some pre-trip preparation, as well as common sense techniques during your travels, you should be able to avoid illnesses and enjoy your vacation.

Before You Leave Home

Resting up before your trip can go a long way toward boosting your immune system and strengthening your body's defenses. "When we're excited about traveling, we tend to not sleep enough," says wellness expert [Peggy Hall](#). "Getting enough sleep [leading up to your trip] can carry through all the changes in time, weather, food, and [your] schedule."

"Always carry medications in your carry-on bag in the event your luggage is lost," says Heather Hunter, PR manager for [AAA](#). "Keep all prescription medication in the original bottles. Bring a copy of the prescription, [and] know the name of the generic medication you are on in case it needs to be refilled."

Hall recommends digestive enzymes, probiotic supplements, and plenty of healthy snacks to keep your energy up naturally. Most supplements for travel-related concerns such as jet lag, gastrointestinal issues, and the like can be found at any natural food or grocery store, as well as drug stores. Whatever you decide to take, it's always a good idea to check in with your primary care physician (particularly if you're on medication) to ensure

there will be no adverse side effects or other concerns.

If you're heading to a more far-flung destination, meet with a doctor who specializes in travel medicine who can help you best prepare for your trip. Additionally, ask your specialist to determine if you'll need vaccinations prior to your departure. "It's ideal to meet with a specialist about a month in advance," says Shlim. "There are a couple of [immunization] series that take a month to complete and most of the time it would [done in] a single [clinic] visit. The body's reaction to the shot maximizes by one month, so you're protected by the time you go. For most of the vaccines, even if you had to leave on short notice, it would be better to take them than not."

Finally, "make photocopies of your medical, dental, and vision insurance cards and keep them in a separate piece of luggage or give a copy to your traveling companion," says Hunter.

At the Airport

Common sense is the name of the game when traveling by air. At the airport and on the plane, wash your hands regularly, especially before eating or drinking, to kill germs that cause colds and the flu.

If you tend to get motion sickness, an over-the-counter remedy to prevent nausea taken prior to take-off may be helpful. Hall recommends ginger; ginger candies and teabags are easy to pack in your handbag and can help soothe an upset stomach or motion sickness once you're on the plane.

Don't worry too much, though, about cold and flu germs on the plane. "Airplanes have shown to have more air flow change than most office buildings, and the actual transmission of disease has been really minimal," says Shlim. "Even when there's a severe disease that someone actually flew with, [once the plane lands] they really only check passengers within a couple of rows on either side and not the whole plane anymore." In other words, if you're in the middle of the plane and notice someone toward the front is coughing frequently, it's not likely that you'll come down with that particular bug. If, however, you're seated next to or across from someone who's exhibiting cold or flu symptoms, you may want to take your preferred medication or remedies as a precaution. Keep your hands clean, avoid touching your mouth and nose, and keep yourself hydrated—these simple practices will go a long way toward battling a cold or flu bug.

At Your Hotel

"Start with a fresh, clean toothbrush," says Hall. "A toothbrush is a breeding ground for bacteria, and the gums and mouth absorb everything. Keep your brush as dry as possible; bacteria can only thrive in wet conditions. Depending on how long your trip is, bring a couple [toothbrushes] and just dispose of them along the way. That in and of itself will help [prevent] an itchy throat or a chronic sore throat."

While many hotel staffs pride themselves on green practices such as reusing linens and towels, Hall suggests one instance where it may be healthier to forego eco-consciousness. "I like to have clean towels every day," she says. "A fresh towel is kind of like the toothbrush, a little bit of dampness is where bacteria thrive." A clean, dry towel will reduce the chances of spreading bacteria and thus the chance to transmit any cold or flu germs.

Additionally, Hall notes that duvets are changed less frequently than linens, so to really reduce exposure, avoid the top blanket entirely. "I personally pull the duvet down and sit on the sheets," says Hall. "The [cleanliness] standards of hotels are pretty good and the sheets should be really clean and crisp."

If a room doesn't meet your cleanliness or hygiene standards, you may be able to ask for a room change (depending on availability and within reason). Remember, though, that in most cases you'll be just fine.

"I know there are a lot of travelers who are very germ-phobic and I just say don't be," says Shlim. "People shouldn't feel, just because they're traveling, they're entering some germ-strewn environment that's any different from their regular environment. Enjoy your hotel rather than trying to decide if it's clean enough."

Mind Over Matter

When you're packing for your trip, make sure to bring along extra remedies and medications that you trust and have worked for you in the past. "If you talk to your friends, they say 'I always take vitamin C, I always take Echinacea, I believe in these things.' But if you tell someone to take something that they don't believe in, then it may not work as well," says Shlim. "If [travelers] have something that helps them head off a cold in Boston, they definitely want to have it with them in Bali."

"If you're the type of person who says 'I know I'm going to get sick when I travel,' you've got to change your attitude about your health," says Hall. "It can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Tell yourself you have all the energy and time you need. Your body is up to the challenge. My whole approach is mind-and-body wellness; it's really linked and it's inexpensive and free as a technique."

If You Get Sick

Unfortunately, there are always going to be instances where you come down with a bug. If it's a minor cold or flu, get your rest, take your remedies, and stay hydrated. If it persists beyond a few days, a doctor's visit is in order.

You may also want to consider purchasing travel insurance, should you be faced with a medical emergency. "Travel insurance can also cover you for costs your health insurance will not cover, and can provide medical referrals for the country where you are currently located," says Hunter. "The insurance company can also relay urgent messages to family, friends, and associates back home."

Note, too, that the most common illness for travelers overseas is diarrhea/gastrointestinal distress. "The risk of diarrhea ranges from 20 to 70 percent depending on the destination," says Shlim. "Without treatment, a diarrheal illness can go on for an average of three to five days. It's a

significant risk. It's almost always caused by bacteria that can be treated with an antibiotic, ciprofloxacin, and you only have to take it for one day. You take one dose and then a second pill 12 hours later, and [can] expect to be better within six to 24 hours.

"Travelers should [also] make sure they have Imodium," says Shlim. "It's a bowel paralyzing agent and that's critical for the way flying is these days. You just can't be in the bathroom at take-off."

Your Turn

How do you prevent illness while traveling? Share your best tips by submitting a comment below!

Guidelines: We love hearing from you, especially when your posts are thoughtful, polite, concise, and unique. However, we do reserve the right to remove posts that are written in less than a "community spirit." Please see the full list of unacceptable comment types [here](#).

Submit a Comment [Why do I need to sign in?](#)

800 character(s) left

Post my comment to Facebook

Email Address

POST COMMENT ▶

Comments: (5)

Newest first



Beth wrote:

I stay away from sweets when I travel and that keeps me feeling well.

Wed Nov 10, 2010 1:24:00 AM

[recommend](#)

| [report abuse](#)



caroa wrote:

I take Zinc plus A & G before traveling helps especially when getting a sore throat which doesn't last as long.

Tue Nov 9, 2010 12:50:19 PM

[recommend](#)

| [report abuse](#)



killifish1 wrote:

I use Airborne just before and during the travel days. Also try to drink plenty of water.

Mon Nov 8, 2010 9:30:44 PM

[recommend](#) (2)

| [report abuse](#)



SusanE wrote:

This comment has been marked as abusive and removed.

Mon Nov 8, 2010 11:08:41 AM

[recommend](#) (1)

| [report abuse](#)