

Air Travel in Comfort

Comfort is not usually the first word that comes to mind when someone mentions flying. A sore back, a kink in the neck and great fatigue are common ailments of flyers. Whether you're a frequent flyer or one of the lucky ones headed south for a trip, plane travel can cause physical stress.

Stretch those legs. Try to get an aisle seat or a seat on the emergency exit for maximum leg room. These seats are also less claustrophobic and allow you to get up and walk around more easily. Sitting in a desperately confined space will not only be uncomfortable for your back, you could even hurt your knees or get leg cramps. Place nothing under the seat in front of you so you can use that space to stretch.

Keep moving. Moving around is good for your circulation and helps to prevent swollen feet and ankles. Wear loose clothing, avoid restrictive garments, and walk about the cabin periodically every 60 - 90 minutes. Wear shoes you can slip off easily and don't cross your legs. Every so often, draw circles with your toes and contract your calves to help prevent blood from pooling in your legs and reduce your risk of phlebitis.

The secret to seat selection. Most airlines fill up the plane from front to back so ask for a seat in the back row to increase your chances of having an empty seat next to you. If the arm rests lift up, you might even be able to lie down.

Dry like a desert. The air in most airplanes has a humidity of less than 20 percent. It dries out your skin, and can cause eye and nasal dryness. Take a moisturizer with you and wear glasses instead of contact lenses. Drink enough fluids (water and juice) and steer clear of caffeine and alcohol as they further dehydrate you. Bring some teabags in your carry-on; mint or lemon-ginger teas have been found helpful with travel sickness. If you are susceptible to motion sickness request a seat over the wings and try to schedule flights on larger airplanes.

Sleep like a baby. If you take a peek at your fellow passengers, you will notice lots of contorted sleep positions. These can lead to kinks in the neck and back, but it doesn't need to be this way. U-shaped travel pillows are great to help keep your spine aligned and prevent your head from flopping forward or sideways during a snooze. You may also consider bringing your pillow from home since hotel pillows are often uncomfortable, too big, too soft or too hard.

How to avoid jetlag. Jetlag often occurs with traveling, especially if you are crossing many time zones. Effects vary from person to person and are caused by a disturbance in your internal clock versus local time at your destination. Melatonin, which is a hormone produced by the pineal gland, is greatly responsible for jetlag. This hormone is normally secreted only at night and is indispensable for proper sleep. With jetlag, the secretion of melatonin takes a few days to settle to normal which explains the sleep disruption. To reduce the effects of jetlag, immediately switch to local time. Only go to sleep once it's nighttime at your destination and not when you're tired. After all, you won't enjoy your trip as much if all you do is sleep!