

Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Healthy Travel

According to the U.S. Travel Association, “mature travelers (those born before 1946) represent 21 percent of all leisure travelers and those who travel in this group take an average of 4.1 leisure trips each year” (<http://www.ustravel.org/news/press-kit/travel-facts-and-statistics>). For sure, the travel “bug” resides in many WWURA members. Whether the trip is a short one day excursion or an extended number of days, there are several things one can do to prevent sickness and injury and to stay healthy during a trip.

Air Travel and shoes! Are you a person who wears sandals or flip flops so you can easily get in and out of them at airport security? Question: what happens if someone steps on your toes or drops a suitcase on your feet? Can you move quickly and safely in flip flops? What kind of dirt/debris might your bare feet be exposed to around an airport or on a plane? Rethink how much safer it would be if you wore shoes that protected your feet! This means closed toed shoes!

Air Travel and exercise. “Exercising on a plane can help you feel better, more importantly it can prevent a major health threat caused by immobility, deep vein thrombosis” (Suchecki). Check his web site for exercises. http://www.ehow.com/how_4516930_exercise-airplane.html Consider carrying a flexi-band to do resistance exercises. Be sure to move legs, stretch, and move up and down the aisle (when there is little or no turbulence) nearly every hour. This is an important activity because it can lessen the potential for deep vein thrombosis (blood clots in veins) from occurring. Wearing compression stockings may be helpful for some individuals.

Air Travel and baggage. Alleviate unnecessary backaches! How heavy do you want to make your suitcase, backpack and/or purse? A good rule of thumb is to see if you can lift your own luggage above your head to put into an overhead bin. Count on yourself rather than others. A backpack, if worn biomechanically appropriately, allows a person to have both hands free to manage other travel needs (e.g., passport/ID, tickets, maps, etc.). As for the purse! Carrying a purse slung over one shoulder causes unnecessary strain on both upper and lower back. The tendency is for one to either “hug” the purse to the neck or to drop the shoulder because the purse pulls the shoulder down. This accentuates whatever “S” or “C” curvature of the spine that already exists. Granted, this is a difficult habit to change because the behavior has occurred over many years. Helpful hint in lessening the weight of a purse is to empty purse contents and eliminate unnecessary items! Choose a purse that can be worn as a fanny pack or that can be worn diagonally across shoulders.

Air Travel and water: Carry an empty water bottle with you as you go through security. Fill the container before entering plane. If flight is long, consider carrying two bottles rather than one large bottle, which is more cumbersome to handle. Dehydration is a fact of life when flying on planes. The more one stays hydrated the better it is.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>) recommends the following survival guide to safe and healthy travel:

BE PROACTIVE! Take steps to anticipate any issues that could arise during your trip.

- Learn about your destination.
- See a doctor before you travel.
- Think about your health status. Are you too sick to travel? (Recent illnesses, injuries, or surgeries). Do you have any special health needs? (e.g., people with disabilities, people with weakened immune systems)

BE PREPARED! No one wants to think about getting sick or hurt during a trip, but sometimes these things happen. You may not be able to prevent every illness or injury, but you can plan ahead to be able to deal with them.

- Pack smart. For example, make up a first aid kit and include such items as tweezers, scissors, band aids, disinfectant wipes, antihistamines, antacid, aspirin/ibuprofen, cough drops, antiseptic ointment, eye-drop lotion, and lip balm.
- Plan ahead for illnesses or injuries during your trip.
- Know what to do if you become sick or injured on your trip.
- Know and share important information about your trip.

BE PROTECTED! It's important to practice healthy behaviors during the trip and after returning home.

- Pay attention to your health during your trip.
 - Use sunscreen and insect repellent as directed.
 - Be careful about food and water.
 - Try not to take risks with your health and safety.
 - Limit alcohol intake, and do not drink alcohol and drive.
 - Wear a seatbelt.
 - Wear protective gear when doing adventure activities.
 - Respect your host country and its people by following local laws and customs.
- Pay attention to your health when you come home.

The Foundation for Health in Aging (established by the American Geriatrics Society) has an interesting list of suggestion for safe travel. Check http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/travel_tips.pdf. The following ideas were suggested:

- Find out if your immunizations need updating (cdc.gov/travel) in relation to where you are traveling.
- Discuss with your doctor your travel plans if you are taking various medications. Consider time zone changes and the timing in taking doses. Request information if any new foods might interact with medications. Obtain generic names of medications and include the dosage amounts.
- Keep medications (both prescription and OTC) in original containers.
- To protect self from potential hand to hand infection contamination, carry alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

The U.S. State Department offers an extensive list of do's and don't. Here are a few helpful suggestions to think about before leaving home!

- If you depend on your eye glasses, pack a spare. If you wear partials or dentures take contact cement in case you break a tooth.
- If you are on medication, get an extra prescription from your physician. If you take shots like insulin, pack extra needles. Bring a letter from your doctor describing the reason for the pills and needles, especially if the pills are a narcotic. Some countries might consider your medication a drug. Plan ahead as how to keep insulin at appropriate temperature.
- Leave irreplaceable jewelry at home. Besides attracting attention, why take a chance on losing it or having it stolen.
- Get medical insurance and make sure your belongings are covered with your home insurance.
- Check with a doctor who treats travel-related disease to see if you need shots or pills against malaria, tetanus, typhoid or hepatitis. (http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html#planning)