



BACK FACTS: Air Travel

Comfort is not usually the first word that comes to mind when someone mentions flying. Sitting cramped in a small space for a long plane ride could also be the perfect recipe for low back pain. Here are some helpful tips for a more enjoyable voyage.



Before you leave

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.

Eat a light, non-fatty meal just before you leave for the airport. Avoid caffeinated beverages and fried food. This can make handling pressure changes and motion a little easier.

The most calming seats. If you are susceptible to motion sickness request a seat over the wings and try to schedule flights on larger airplanes. Seats beside a window can also help if you gaze into the horizon.

Pack chewing gum. Chewing, yawning or sucking on hard candies can help to relieve the pressure that builds up in your ears as the airplane ascends and descends. This is not recommended for toddlers. For young children, sipping a drink may help.

During the flight

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 confined space will not only be uncomfortable for your back, you could also strain your knees or get leg cramps. If possible, 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 and walk about the cabin periodically every 60 to 90 minutes. Wear shoes you can slip off easily. Every so often, draw circles with your toes and contract your calves to help prevent blood from pooling in your legs. Tapping your feet as if keeping time to music can also help increase circulation and reduce the chance of muscle cramping. For a quick and easy stretch, stand up and raise your arms above your head.

If your neck muscles get sore from sitting, rotate your shoulders back and forth, bend your neck by bringing your ear to your shoulder and by bringing your chin to your chest.

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 for your skin and wear glasses instead of contact lenses to prevent eye dryness. Drink enough fluids (water and juice) and steer clear of caffeine and alcohol as they further dehydrate you. Alcohol can also interfere with your ability to sleep.

Good posture while seated. When sitting for a prolonged period of time, position your lower back against the back of the chair to obtain the greatest amount of support for your spine. A rolled sweater can also be used for added support. Use the footrests on your seat. Most importantly, try not to stay in one position for a long period of time. Accept whatever pillows and blankets are available and use them to change the pressure distribution of your body weight on the seat when sitting for a prolonged time.

Canada's chiropractors – here to help

Chiropractors can help you prevent back problems and maintain good posture. Should you suffer back or neck strain, a chiropractor can also provide treatment for your pain.

Fact: 80 per cent of Canadians will suffer from back pain in their lifetime. If required, a chiropractor can treat your pain through a variety of methods. These can include: spinal and joint adjustment, modalities such as ultrasound or TENS, soft tissue therapy and therapeutic exercises.

For more information, or to locate a chiropractor near you, please visit the Canadian Chiropractic Association's website www.ccachiro.org.

Remember: on a long flight, don't sit tight.

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