

Women's Health: Tips for travel during pregnancy

by *Kenneth L. Noller, MD*

Some women worry about the safety of traveling while pregnant, but just because you're expecting doesn't mean that you can't go on vacation. Although the middle of your pregnancy—weeks 14 through 28—is the best time to travel, women can travel safely until a few weeks before their due date in many cases.

Air travel is almost always safe for women with low-risk pregnancies. Pregnant women should observe the same general precautions for air travel as the general population and can fly safely up to 36 weeks of gestation. Try to sit near the front of the plane, where the ride is smoother, and choose an aisle seat for easier access to the restrooms. On long flights, get up and walk around every once in a while to reduce the risk of leg swelling and blood clots.

All pregnant women should avoid flying in private planes at altitudes above 7,000 feet because oxygen levels in nonpressurized cabins can make you sick. Women with conditions that are aggravated by high altitude such as pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, uncontrolled diabetes, sickle cell disease or trait, or the risk of preterm delivery (before 37 weeks) should not fly at all during pregnancy.

If you travel by car, plan to spend no more than five or six hours driving each day and take regular breaks so you can get out and stretch your legs. Keep the airbags turned on and sit at least 10 inches back from the dashboard, if possible.

Use a lap/shoulder belt every time you get into a car. Wear the lap belt low on the hip bones, the shoulder belt across the center of the chest between your breasts (never under your arm), and tighten the belt to a snug fit.

Bus or train travel during pregnancy can be difficult because of the small aisles and bathrooms and sometimes bumpy conditions. Be sure to hold on to railings and seat backs when moving about and use caution when entering and exiting.

If you are going on a cruise, ask your doctor about safe medicines for calming seasickness. Additionally, make sure that there is a staff doctor or nurse on board and that the ship will dock in areas with modern medical facilities.

Planning a trip abroad? Check with your doctor before making vacation plans to ensure that your destination is a safe one for pregnant women. Allow enough time to get any vaccinations you might need. Women traveling outside the country should also keep a copy of their medical records on hand.

For more information, the ACOG Patient Education Pamphlet "Travel During Pregnancy" is available at www.acog.org/publications/patient_education/bp055.cfm.

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