



Goin' Mobile

By Tamara Mitchell



A lot of people end up injuring themselves when they are traveling because they are doing activities they don't normally do....or they are doing activities more intensely than they do during the rest of the year. We want to help you avoid injuries and make your trip more comfortable with a few tips for various types of travel!

Sitting in a car or airplane for many hours is just as stressful to your body as sitting at your desk. What makes traveling worse is that you are forced into a rigid position with little or no back support, no height adjustment, and poor neck support. In an aircraft, you add the insult of cabin pressurization and often sleeping in strange positions. At the end of such ordeals, you are likely to have swollen ankles and feet, a cramped lower back, and a crick in your neck.

Are you carrying heavy suitcases through the airport, or loading boxes of camping gear and awkward sports equipment into the car? We can almost hear your back popping out of alignment. This is not a good way to start your vacation...or end it, either!

What can you do to limit the possibility of injuries? We would like to share some products and suggestions which will make your vacation much more enjoyable and hopefully pain free.

AIR AND TRAIN TRAVEL

1. Buy an inflatable neck pillow to keep in your carry-on luggage. Use it whenever you nap or sleep on the airplane or train. Adjust the inflation so it supports your head, but doesn't prevent your head from resting on the seat back. When you are sleeping, this will keep your head in a neutral upright position and will prevent neck cramps. For people who have never been able to sleep on an airplane or train, this may change your life!
2. Stand up and walk around. Do isometric exercises in your seat. Do everything you can to increase circulation to avoid having fluids pool in your legs and feet. The Worldwide Travel Planner website has several isometric exercises to try, as well as many other helpful suggestions for making your air travel more comfortable: http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/air_isometric.html.
3. Use napsacks and luggage with wheels and telescoping handles for moving through the airport, train station and streets at your destination. A favorite option is the rolling backpack suitcase with zip-off daypack since you are able to roll the suitcase or carry it on your back when rolling is not possible. The daypack zips off to use when you are able to leave the rest of your luggage behind. Backpacks distribute the load evenly across your back rather than pulling your spine sideways (as a conventional suitcase does). Recent improvements have made these backpacks much lighter weight. Eagle Creek and High Sierra, among others make these combo suitcases. If you visit www.ebags.com, click on the Backpacks tab, then Wheeled Backpacks on the left menu, then Travel Packs on the left menu again, you'll find some great deals on various models of this style.
4. Place a small pillow behind your lower back to provide lumbar support.
5. If you read, give your eyes a rest every half hour. Look out the window or focus on something for a few minutes.
6. Avoid all alcohol and tobacco while flying. Airplane cabins are only pressurized to a barometric pressure equivalent to an 8,000 ft. mountain. This means that your body absorbs from 5% to 20% less oxygen than it would at sea level, depending upon the person, the plane, and the length of flight. Alcohol further decreases oxygen absorption and smoking damages the lung membranes used to absorb oxygen into the blood. The resulting "hypoxia" may only lead to a slight headache or feeling of tiredness, but unfortunately there are common occurrences of passengers having difficulty breathing and even having cardiac arrest

because of the stress of reduced oxygen uptake by their bodies. The heart must pump harder and faster to try to keep the body supplied with enough oxygen.

7. Engine oil, hydraulic fluids, or de-icing solutions can enter the cabin air supply and insecticides are commonly used on international flights. These can lead to allergic or asthmatic reactions in some people and are not healthy for the general population to breathe. Just be aware that, if you have respiratory problems, flying may be a danger.

For further information on these topics, please read: <http://www.scienceblog.org/community/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=110>

CAR TRAVEL:

1. Be sure you adjust the car seat when you first get into the car. If you are the driver, it is important to maintain as neutral a position as possible. This means that the seat should be close enough to the steering wheel so that your feet are comfortable on the pedals and that your arms are hanging loosely when your hands are on the steering wheel. When your arms are extended for any period of time, there is unnecessary strain on your upper and lower back as well as shoulder and arm tension. The seat back should be adjusted so that you are sitting in an upright position. Reclining the seat back requires that you hold your head forward, which will tire your neck and shoulders. You will also have to hold your arms up, again resulting in back and shoulder muscle tension. Use of lumbar cushions or car seat supports may provide relief for people who find that extended car trips stress their lower backs or tailbones. Take a look at our webpage: <http://working-well.org/pchair.html#car> for lumbar and seat cushions. The SacroEase and Backfriend are specifically designed for use in your car.
2. Remember to use cruise control! Holding your foot on the accelerator pedal for hours can produce tendinitis in the top of the foot and muscle tension in the foot and leg. Cruise control allows you to rest your feet in a more comfortable place on the car floor.
3. Take rest breaks. Stop to stretch and walk around for a few minutes at least every hour. Sitting for long periods of time causes reduced circulation and eye strain. Drink plenty of fluids to remain hydrated, which also aids circulation and other body functions.
4. To avoid neck cramps, use pillows or inflatable neck pillows if you find that your car does not provide adequate head support. These are especially important for passengers who sleep while riding in the car.
5. Use high quality UV filter and polarized sunglasses to reduce glare and eye fatigue. Keep windows adjusted so that you don't have wind blowing in your eyes; they will dry out and be very irritated by the end of the day.
6. Let your hands relax while driving. Don't grip the steering wheel or the gear shift knob tightly even if the traffic is bad or the kids are screaming in the back seat!
7. When loading and unloading baggage, remember to hold heavy objects close to your body and use your legs to lift, not your back. To avoid back injuries, never twist while loading the car. Instead, pick up the baggage, then turn and place it in the car. For more information on proper lifting techniques, refer to our webpage: <http://working-well.org/backrules.html>.



This is only a few tips to help you have a safe and comfortable vacation. Pay attention to the aches and muscle tension you feel, track down the source, and see if you can't find a way to make things easier for your body. Print out and take along a copy of our webpage on self-help measures: <http://working-well.org/ctd.html>. We hope you won't need them, but if you find you've strained or injured yourself while on vacation, you might be glad you have them to consult!

Have a wonderful trip!

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