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Traveling for Business or Pleasure? Tips to Stay Healthy On-the-Go

by Dr. Nancy D. O'Reilly

Traveling for Business or Pleasure? Tips to Stay Healthy On-the-Go

More and more people are heading to destinations across the globe. Whether for work or play, people are finding it easier than ever to take that flight to Europe, or that road trip to the mountains or that train ride to meet with a client. This on-the-go lifestyle can leave much to be desired when it comes to health. Often, traveling means eating greasy food when you have time, picking up germs from fellow travelers or staying at hotels where your body hasn't quite adjusted to a new location's temperature, altitude or time zone.

There are easy ways to can stay fit and healthy, even while on the road. By taking some precautions, you can reduce the strain of traveling on your health.

You can't always control the weather delays or airport cancellations,

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which can add stress to your trip, but you can take some precautions to stay comfortable on the plane:

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing. You may want to bring an extra sweater or small blanket in case the plane gets too cold.
- Before your flight, try to burn off any nervous energy. Take a 30-minute walk around the airport, or if you have time before you leave the house, take a walk around the block a couple of times.
- Quench your thirst with water or juice, and avoid alcohol and caffeine. The atmosphere inside the airplane is very dry, and passengers can easily become dehydrated. When a person is dehydrated, their blood thickens and puts them at risk for blood clots.
- During the flight, do some stretches and leg lifts in your seat. Try small exercises like flexing and extending your ankles and do ankle circles.
- If your flight is long, be sure to get out of your seat and move around at least once every hour if possible.
- Wash your hands frequently. If you want to, carry some hand sanitizer in your bag or bring hand wipes with you.

When you arrive at your destination, head to your hotel or resort to unpack and get situated. If you're staying with a family member or friend, you can still use some of these tips to be more relaxed in a new setting and more importantly, get a good night's sleep:

- Select a comfortable pillow – but one that is firm enough to keep your head in alignment with your spine. It may be more comfortable for you to bring a pillow from home when you travel.
- Keep your room as dark as possible during bedtime. Use window blinds and shades to block out light, so you can be ready to get a full night's rest.
- Remove any distracting noises with the steady sound of a fan or air conditioner. Consider bringing a CD with nature sounds such as waves or falling rain.
- Try to maintain a bedroom temperature of 60 to 65 degrees.
- Keep a schedule to sleep at around the same time as you would normally, to avoid disturbing your body's natural sleep patterns. This may not be possible for every destination, but keeping a similar schedule as the one your body is used to can go a long way to getting a good night's rest and enough energy for the next day.

Eating "right" when you're on-the-go can be a challenge, especially with enticing foods and new cuisines. Here are some tips you can use to avoid the fast-food trap and eat balanced meals while traveling:

- Keeping a schedule is important when you're traveling. It helps if you eat at the times when you would normally eat. For instance, in some European countries, dinner isn't served until 8 or 9 P.M.! This may throw off your appetite, and even your sleep patterns, so you may want to try and eat at a time that is normal for you.
- Start your day off right with a healthy breakfast. If you don't think you have enough time, make the time! You can order room service, or just wake up earlier than usual. Breakfast is extremely important for keeping one's energy up.
- Worried about your weight? What matters for weight control is how the total calories you eat all day compares to the total you

burn up.

- For many people, traveling also means eating high-calorie “junk food,” rather than fruit or other foods low in calories and high in nutrients. Instead of heading to the local fast-food place for a quick meal, pack some nutritious snacks that travel easily. Peanut butter and crackers, fresh fruit, granola and water bottles travel well.
- Watch the amount of alcohol and caffeine you consume when you travel. Too much of either substance can affect your body in a negative way, including your ability to sleep well.
- If you must eat out, there are healthy choices available no matter where you go. Even fast-food restaurants like McDonalds and Burger King offer a wide selection of salads. Watch out for things that sound healthy but aren't. Veggies loaded up with butter and salt or salads that come with high-fat dressings should be avoided.

No matter what travel plans you have in the future, it is possible to keep your diet balanced and your body fit on-the-go. Using these tips on your next trip will help you reduce the stress of travel, while also keeping your body as healthy as possible.

Dr. Nancy D. O'Reilly is a clinical psychologist, researcher and founder of the online resource WomenSpeak.com. A member of the American Psychological Association with more than 25 years of experience, she counsels clients on topics ranging from mental health and stress to relationships and careers. She is author of “You Can't Scare Me: Women Speak About Growing Older in a Youth-Oriented Society,” and will host a radio program on Voice America, called “Courageous WomenSpeak” beginning October 2007. For more information, visit her website: www.womenspeak.com or call: 417-860-5834.

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