

SCRIPT – BROADCAST – CURING THE TRAVEL BLUES

With travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning to ease and warmer months upon us, people are starting to make travel plans. While things may look different for the foreseeable future, people are still anxious to get away for some summer fun. For some travelers, hitting the road or flying to a favorite destination also means getting out of rhythm, and that can lead to changes in bowel habits.

It's called travel constipation and there are many reasons for a sudden change, including changes to your internal clock, the food you eat, the size and timing of your meals, increased time spent sitting on airplanes or in a car, or simply your digestive system being affected by the stresses related to travel.

SOT: Dr. Leonardo Lopez, Family Medicine Physician – OSF HealthCare

“Several factors can play into that. For some people there can be some significant discomfort and bloating. A lot of times you're traveling for vacation and it can really affect the quality and enjoyment of the vacation.” (:15)

Constipation is usually defined as experiencing fewer than three bowel movements in a week. If constipation isn't something you've dealt with before, it can put a real cramp in your travel plans if things suddenly start to slow down.

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“Another thing I think is a big part of it is hydration. People are on the move and they feel they want to go to the bathroom all the time while they're trying to move. If they're on an airplane, they don't want to get out of their seat all the time. If they are on a long drive they don't want to stop very often. Dehydration is a big part of it too. Not only is the rhythm of your day is messed up because maybe you're starting your day earlier or later. Also, maybe the normal time you would have your bowel movement you're traveling at that moment so your rhythm is off. Both contribute a big part – the hydration part and the fact your rhythm is off.” (:37)

There are other things you can do to help keep things moving smoothly.

- Don't consume too much caffeine
- Don't sit for long periods of time
- Don't skip meals or fill up on junk food
- Don't ignore your body when it's telling you it's time.
- Alcohol isn't the cure for hydration. Water is still the best option, whether your vacation includes outdoor or indoor activities.

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“So the basic answer should be when you’re thirsty you should drink and people are generally avoiding drinking. Bring a bottle of water with you and sip on that as you travel along and that should be enough hydration. A bottle every two hours would be fine. Everyone has different needs as far as hydration. And it also depends how you were the day before.” (:23)

Dr. Lopez also recommends taking time to enjoy healthy, balanced meals. While it seems fun to eat junk food on vacation, especially when your days are packed with activities, dietary fiber is essential for keeping your bowels moving. Pack fruits, high-fiber protein bars, trail mixes, cereals and granolas for your trip. Yogurts, salads and oatmeal are other popular options.

If all else fails, Dr. Lopez says there are over-the-counter medications that can help get you through your trip without any issues – at least where your bowels are concerned.