

Planes, trains, automobiles...and your health (part two)

Here's how to keep your health in mind ahead of summer vacations, whether across town or across the world

Summer means getaways to de-stress and make memories. But the last thing you want is to catch a cold or worse, especially if you're halfway across the world where health care resources might be different or scarce.

It's not too late to make some quick preparations, says [Jennifer Whitfill, APRN](#), a family nurse practitioner at OSF HealthCare.

- Know your destination and what to do if something goes wrong.

"If you have a medical condition, have your medications with dosages on a list. Have your health care provider's information on that same page. That way in case something happens, they know how to get ahold of the provider to ask questions," Whitfill says. "Investigate where is the closest health care facility, whether that's a hospital or an urgent care, in case you need care quickly."

This is especially important, for example, for people with heart conditions who might require a complex level of care at a moment's notice.

- Consider travel insurance: It might not be needed for every trip, but it can give you some peace of mind.
- Crowded areas: Train stations and airports are full of people from all walks of life, and it's a safe bet that some of them are under the weather.

"Good hand hygiene is huge," Whitfill says, especially after contacting high-touch areas like an escalator railing. "If you are immunocompromised or worried about catching something, you can always mask. Boost your immune system [prior to travel], and keep your distance [from others] as much as possible."

- Sleep: If you're crossing multiple time zones, adjust your sleep a few days in advance to avoid exhaustion. Whitfill says if you're traveling east, go to bed and wake up a few hours earlier each day. If you're traveling west, go to bed and wake up a few hours later.

"Book a flight that lands early in the evening. After landing, try to remain awake until 10 p.m. local time. That helps adjust the body's sleep cycle," Whitfill explains. "Also practice good sleep hygiene. Drink plenty of fluids. When you're flying, get up multiple times to keep blood flowing. Stay away from alcohol and caffeinated beverages."

- Food and drink: You might have heard claims from friends and family that the water in [insert location here] is dirty and unsafe. That might be a bit exaggerated, but when in doubt Whitfill says to use bottled water, even when brushing your teeth. And pack some medicine in case you get diarrhea (Imodium or Pepto Bismol) or constipation (probiotic or laxative).