Safety Shots

Safety is no Accident!

Healthy Air Travel

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Staying healthy during air travel can be a challenge, especially on long flights, as the confined space, dry air, and changes in cabin pressure can affect your body in various ways. However, with a few smart strategies, you can minimize discomfort and maintain your well-being throughout the journey.

One of the most important factors to consider is hydration. Airplane cabins have low humidity, which can lead to dehydration, causing dry skin, tiredness, and headaches. To combat this, it's crucial to drink plenty of water before, during, and after your flight. Although it can be tempting to consume alcoholic and caffeinated beverages like coffee or soda, they can have a diuretic effect and increase dehydration. Opting for water or herbal teas is a better choice. Bringing a reusable water bottle (and filling it after security) is a good idea to ensure you have access to water when you need it. To help alleviate dry skin, consider using a moisturizing lotion or lip balm to prevent your skin and lips from drying out. It's also a good idea to bring saline nasal gel or a hydrating facial mist to keep your nasal passages and face hydrated.

Movement is another key factor in staying healthy during air travel. Sitting for extended periods, especially on long flights, can lead to poor circulation and increase the risk of blood clots, particularly in the legs. To combat this, make it a habit to move around every hour or so by walking up and down the aisle. Simple in-seat exercises, such as ankle rotations, leg lifts, and stretching your arms, can also help keep your blood flowing.

When it comes to sleep, getting adequate rest on a flight is important for maintaining your energy and overall health. Since it can be difficult to sleep in a cramped airplane seat, consider using neck pillows, eye masks, and noise-canceling headphones to make

sleeping more comfortable. Try to adjust your sleep schedule before the flight to help minimize jet lag, and if possible, sleep in short intervals to ensure your body remains refreshed.

Another important aspect of staying healthy during air travel is nutrition. Airport food and airplane meals are often high in salt and fat, which can contribute to dehydration and bloating. Whenever possible, pack healthy snacks like nuts, fruits, and granola bars to help you avoid unhealthy options. If you must eat on the plane, opt for lighter meals and avoid alcohol, as it can dehydrate you and disrupt your sleep.

Another issue with drinking alcohol while flying is its effect on altitude and alcohol tolerance. The reduced oxygen levels at high altitudes can amplify the effects of alcohol on the body. It can impair your coordination, judgment, and reaction time more quickly than it would at sea level. This can be especially dangerous if you're trying to move around the cabin or respond to a situation in an emergency. It may also lead to more intense feelings of dizziness, nausea, or a hangover once you land.

Finally, be mindful of your personal hygiene. Airplanes can be a breeding ground for germs, so it's important to wash your hands regularly, or use hand sanitizer when soap and water are unavailable. Consider wiping down your seat area, including the tray table, armrests, and seatbelt buckle, with disinfecting wipes, as these surfaces can harbor bacteria. This can help reduce your risk of getting sick, especially on longer flights.

Staying healthy during air travel involves staying hydrated, moving regularly, getting quality rest, eating nutritious snacks, and practicing good hygiene. By taking these simple precautions, you can reduce discomfort and arrive at your destination feeling refreshed and ready for your next adventure.

Linda Johnston is a long-time skier and ski club activist and has led many group trips to ski destinations in North and South America. She raised her two sons on Arizona and Colorado ski hills. Linda is a doctor of physical therapy, practicing in orthopedics for over 40 years in Phoenix, Arizona.