

Travel Advice

Water

Diseases can be caught from drinking contaminated water, or swimming in it. Unless you **know** the water supply is safe where you are staying, **only use** (in order of preference):

1. Boiled water.
2. Bottled water or canned drinks.
3. Water treated by a sterilising agent.

This includes **ice cubes** in drinks and water for **cleaning your teeth**.

Swimming

It is safer to swim in water that is well chlorinated. If you are travelling to Africa, South America or some parts of the Caribbean, **avoid swimming** in fresh water **lakes and streams**. You can catch a parasitic disease called **Schistosomiasis** from such places. This disease is also known as **Bilharzia**. It is wise **never to go barefoot**, but to wear protective footwear when out, even on the beach. Other diseases can be caught from sand and soil, particularly wet soil.

Food

Contaminated food is the commonest source of many diseases abroad. You can help prevent it by following these guidelines:

- * **Only eat well-cooked fresh food**
- * **Avoid leftovers and reheated foods**
- * **Ensure meat is thoroughly cooked**
- * **Eat cooked vegetables, avoid salads**
- * **Only eat fruit you can peel**
- * **Never drink unpasteurised milk**
- * **Avoid ice cream and shellfish**
- * **Avoid buying food from street vendor's stalls**

Two phrases to help you remember:

1. Cook it, peel it, or leave it!
2. When in doubt, leave it out!

Animal Bites

Rabies is present in many parts of the world. If rabies is not treated, death is 100% certain.

There are 3 rules regarding rabies:

1. Do not touch any animal, even dogs and cats.
2. If you are licked on broken skin or bitten in a country which has rabies, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for 5 minutes.
3. Seek medical advice **immediately**, even if you have been previously immunised.

Air Travel

It is sensible on any long haul flight to:

- * Be comfortable in your seat.
- * Exercise your legs, feet and toes while sitting every half an hour or so and take short walks whenever feasible. Upper body and breathing exercises can further improve circulation.
- * Drink plenty of water and be sensible about alcohol intake which in excess leads to dehydration.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Blood Borne Infections (including HIV)

If the traveller indulges in casual sex the risk of infection with a sexually transmitted disease is high.

It is difficult to be sure about the risk of HIV infection in different parts of the world. However, it is clear that the infection is widespread and although the risk is high amongst homosexual and intravenous drug using groups in 'Western' countries, on a global scale it is primarily a heterosexually spread disease.

Precautions to take:

1. Casual sexual intercourse is risky. Condoms provide good, but not complete protection.
2. Unless you are absolutely certain that the equipment being used is sterile, skin-damaging procedures such as ear piercing, tattooing, acupuncture, manicure and shaving with open razors should be avoided.
3. In many developing countries re-use of medical supplies, including needles and syringes, is common. Travel packs are available from some chemists and travel clinics, containing sterile injecting equipment for use in an emergency (eg when skin cuts need suturing, an intravenous drip or injections are required or for dental surgery). These needle kits should be supplied with a certificate showing contents and the reason for its purchase, useful for customs clearance.
4. Blood transfusion: In most of Western Europe, North America, Japan and Australasia all donated blood is now screened for HIV antibodies. However, in most developing countries there may be only the most basic blood transfusion services and much of the blood donated is unscreened. The risks from blood transfusion in such circumstances is high. Thus, points to consider are:
 - ❖ accidents are the commonest reason for needing a blood transfusion
 - ❖ blood transfusion should only be accepted when essential.

Sun Damage to the Skin

Although sunbathing may be enjoyable and a suntan a status symbol, it must be remembered that excessive sun exposure is a health hazard due to the effect of ultraviolet (UV) radiation on the skin.

Precautions:

- ❖ Babies under 9 months should be kept out of direct sunlight.
- ❖ Children should wear long sleeved, loose fitting shirts, hats and high-factor sunscreen.
- ❖ Adults should wear a broad brimmed hat, long sleeved shirts and sunglasses.

Sunscreens:

- ❖ Sunscreens do not replace the precautions described above but they can help absorb UVB and to a lesser extent UVA.
- ❖ To gain effective protection a cream with an SPF value of 30 or above should be used.

ADVICE SHEET FOR PATIENTS PLANNING A FLIGHT

MOST people can fly with no worries but passengers who suffer from heart disease, lung disease, cancer, or have a family history of DVT or are recovering from a recent operation should consult their doctor prior to any flight.

The real risk of developing DVT remains extremely low but we would advise you follow the guidelines listed below.

Take plenty of exercise, even before you fly. One tablet of aspirin on the morning of the flight helps reduce the stickiness of the blood and decreases the risk of a clot developing, but consult your doctor first.

On board a few regular, simple exercises in your seat will help the flow of blood, and buy a pair of special elastic stockings to wear during the flight. These promote the flow of blood through the veins.

Drink plenty of water during the flight to dilute the risk of a clot developing and don't drink too much alcohol.

Medical Guidelines:

❖ **Ear problems**

If you suffer from sinusitis, an infection of the middle ear or other blockage it is advisable not to fly until the problem has been resolved to avoid the possibility of experiencing severe pain.

❖ **Heart Disease**

Consult your doctor. You should certainly not travel within 21 days of a heart attack.

❖ **Angina**

This is not normally a problem provided the condition is stable and attacks are infrequent.

❖ **Diabetes**

If you have insulin dependent diabetes there is no reason why you cannot fly although it would be wise to consult your doctor about your insulin management regime.

❖ **Recent Surgery**

Flying is not normally advisable for 21 days after abdomen, chest or middle ear surgery.

❖ **Neurological Disorders**

Epilepsy doesn't normally create a problem although travel would be restricted within 24 hours of a *grand mal fit*. You may also fly 21 days after a stroke provided symptoms are stable and your condition is improving. Be guided by your doctor.

❖ **Pregnancy**

It's not a medical condition but in the interest of pregnant travellers' welfare, travel is normally restricted up to 28 weeks without a doctor's letter and 34 weeks with a doctor's letter.

Please contact the surgery if you have any queries – 01564 739194