

Be a Healthy Traveler



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It's that time of the year. The snow is falling, the air is chilly and the rivers and streams are freezing over. I find myself looking through my drawers for my gloves and tuque. I also find myself surfing travel sites on the internet daily. I crave some sun, some heat—some travel.

If you are like me, you probably hope to take it easy over the holidays. You've thought of your tickets, your passport, your money and which bathing suit to wear, but have you given any thought to your health? Traveling has become so common in North America that we forget the health risks that can be involved and we falsely assume, in many cases, that every country offers easy access to medical facilities, as in our homeland. Here are 10 tips to help make your vacation fun, invigorating and, most importantly, healthy.

1. Plan ahead: Here are some items to check off before you board that plane:
 - Consult your physician or licensed health care practitioner before you leave, particularly if you have a serious medical condition.
 - Check with your governmental health organization to see what immunizations are required.
 - Bring enough medication and supplements for your whole trip, for example, malaria pills or a good probiotic (acidophilus).
 - In case you run out, see if your medications and supplements are available in your country of destination.
 - Have a dental check up. Nothing is worse than having tooth pain while on your trip.
2. Travel insurance: This may be the most important item on your list. Despite our best precautions, sometimes accidents happen. A medical stay in a foreign country could cost you thousands of dollars. Before you travel, always arrange health insurance adequate for your destination.
3. Eat and drink safely: Wherever you are in the world, be careful what you eat and drink. Food and water may be contaminated in a variety of ways. Just because it looks delectable, doesn't mean it's not contaminated. Traveler's diarrhea is very common, if not the most common traveler's sickness. Contaminated food or water often causes traveler's diarrhea and other diseases, such as cholera, typhoid and hepatitis.
4. Take care in the sun: At this time of year, many people travel in search of the sun. Sun worshipping is fine, but overexposure can cause sunburn, leading to premature skin aging and an increased risk of skin cancer. Sunburns are caused by ultraviolet (UV) rays. The closer you are to the equator, the higher the intensity of UV rays. Prolonged sun exposure may also put you at risk for sunstroke or heatstroke. Never underestimate the effect of careless exposure to the sun. Just because you are not burning right now, doesn't mean you won't be tonight.
5. Play safely: A foreign land may not be the best place to try the latest, greatest high-risk sport. Be conscious of your current injuries and avoid activities that would cause them to flare up. If you are playing sports, follow all the relevant safety guidance, make sure that there are adequate emergency medical facilities on hand and check that you have medical insurance that covers you fully in the event of any accident. If you are a scuba diver, you should wait at least 24 hours between your last dive and a flight.
6. Carry some supplements: Although you don't need to carry your entire medicine chest with you, it is important to carry some supplements. If the bottles take up too much room, buy a small pill container or use a sandwich bag.
7. Epidemics: Check with your governmental health agency before you leave for any disease outbreaks. You may also check with the World Health Organization.

8. Carry a medical kit: A medical kit contains supplies for accidents, injuries and other illnesses. These kits can be purchased from most pharmacies and health care providers.

9. Homeopathic travel: Homeopathic medicine is an extremely powerful, safe and effective treatment for a number of first aid conditions. A homeopathic kit can be purchased from most supplement markets and licensed naturopathic doctors.

10. Immunizations: A number of countries require immunizations to prevent you contracting, and even spreading, certain infectious diseases. Check with your governmental health agency or the World Health Organization.

Have fun. Relax. Read a good book. Enjoy your time away. Travel is a time to learn, not just about other cultures, but about yourself, your life and your relationships. If you have to splurge, then splurge. Remember the 80:20 Rule: be good 80% of the time and not so good 20% of the time. Enjoy your vacation —you've certainly earned it.