



Holiday Health

Holidays are meant to be a time for relaxing and unwinding and not for being stuck in your sick bed.

We've outlined some of the top things to be aware of to keep you fighting fit on your travels...



Vaccinations

Depending on which part of the world you are travelling to you may, or may not, require travel vaccinations. Types of vaccinations range greatly and include Malaria, Yellow Fever and Typhoid. Make sure you thoroughly research your destination before travelling and if you need a vaccination, you should visit either your GP or a travel health clinic. Depending on how long you are in the country for, you may need to have more than one vaccination to make sure you are covered for the entire length of your stay. Make sure you contact your GP or travel clinic in plenty of time before you go away – the recommended time is at least 6-10 weeks before you leave.

First aid kit

No matter where you are travelling to it's a good idea to put together a standard first aid kit for the most common ailments. Here's a few essentials for any travel first aid kit:

- * Sunscreen (factor 15 minimum)
- * Insect repellent
- * Cream for sunburn and insect bites
- * Anti-diarrhoea medicine
- * Rehydration sachets
- * Plasters and bandages
- * Sterile dressings
- * Tape
- * Scissors
- * Tweezers
- * Safety pins
- * Alcohol gel to disinfect
- * Calamine lotion
- * Painkillers

Existing medical conditions

Those travelling with existing medical conditions need to be aware of restrictions when travelling with medication. Hand luggage is often restricted, so if you require any special medication, such as insulin, you should try to get an exemption certificate from the airline you are travelling with – for this you will need to provide the airline with a letter from your doctor stating your medical requirements. It is also a good idea to source an up-to-date letter from your GP if you are taking medication with you in your hold luggage in case you are questioned at customs.

Existing medical conditions

The most common health issues raised on holiday are related to people getting too much sun, which can cause a number of problems for travellers. The best advice to avoid these health problems is to drink plenty of water and stay out of the sun at the hottest time of the day.

Below are some of the main problems associated with hot climates and over-exposure to the sun that you should be aware of:

Heat exhaustion

Caused by a salt-deficiency. If you have heat exhaustion you will need to get into the shade and drink plenty of water. If you suffer from a headache or muscle cramps it is advisable to drink an oral rehydration sachet in addition to water and remain out of the sun.

Heat stroke

A possible result of heat exhaustion, symptoms include a quickening pulse, rapid breathing, headache, high temperature and confusion. Keeping cool and taking on board plenty of fluids is essential. Heat stroke can be extremely serious, so anyone suffering from this should seek medical attention.

Prickly heat

Suffered by many, prickly heat is an irritating rash and can be treated with a cool shower and calamine lotion. To try and prevent this occurring, avoid excessive heat, keep your skin cool and wear loose clothing.

Sunburn

Something we've all no doubt experienced at one time or another, the important thing to remember with sunburn is that prevention is better than cure, so apply lots of sunscreen and if you have a pale skin tone use a higher factor. If you do burn, use calamine lotions, after sun creams (Aloe Vera is most effective) and painkillers to relieve the symptoms. If you are badly burnt and it turns to blisters you should seek medical help.

Sun cream is often applied too thinly, so make sure you use a large amount and re-apply every two to three hours. It should also be applied at least 30 minutes before going out into the sun. You should never stay in the sun for excessive periods of time without reapplying and should always re-apply after you have been in the water. The higher the SPF factor on your cream, the greater the protection against UVB rays, which cause burning. A high SPF factor will only help prevent burning - it will not always protect against UVA rays, UVA protection is usually rated separately between 2 and 4 so be aware of this when you are purchasing sun creams. If using insect repellents, these should be applied on top of sunscreen.

Mosquito bites

Mosquitoes are particularly prominent in the evenings, but if you are in a mosquito area then it is advisable to use a repellent spray whenever venturing outside. You should protect all exposed areas, especially the ankles, and spray on the repellent before leaving and on your return. Avoid strong perfumes, hair sprays or after-shaves, as these can attract mosquitoes. Use air-conditioning if it is available as it helps keep the mosquitoes away due to the lower temperature and make sure that windows or shutters are not left open at night.

Food and water

When travelling abroad, food and water safety should always be a consideration. In some countries the tap water supply may not be safe to drink. Always check with your accommodation or tour operator before you arrive at your destination. If the tap water is unsafe to drink, then only use bottled water for drinking and brushing your teeth. If you are making up bottles for babies make sure you use the bottled water for this also. Keeping a bottle of water by the sink is a good way to remind everyone. If the tap water is unsafe to drink then it is important to remember to ask for no ice in drinks in case this has come from the tap.

When eating out, choose restaurants that are busy or that have been recommended and check that their standards of hygiene are acceptable.

Accidents and hazards

Road accidents are responsible for more deaths amongst tourists than any other form of accident. Remember the traffic may come from the opposite direction than at home and drivers in many countries do not observe pedestrian crossings, so be careful. Fire is also a common cause of accidents abroad, so make sure you check the fire escapes at your accommodation and always look for emergency exits and check balconies and first aid arrangements on arriving.

Look after your personal safety when abroad and do not travel in areas that are not safe, especially not at night or on your own.

When swimming in the sea beware of fast moving tides and currents and if the beach has a lot of stones or shells on it then try to wear footwear, as injuries to the feet are extremely common on stony beaches.
