

Travel When You Are Pregnant

Is it safe to travel during pregnancy?

Usually it is safe to travel during the first 7 to 8 months of pregnancy. The main concerns with travel during pregnancy are access to medical care, discomfort, getting enough exercise and fluids, and having healthy foods available.

If you do plan to travel, discuss the trip with your healthcare provider. Talk about:

- The distance and length of the trip
- The mode of travel
- Any suggestions for things you should or should not do before, during, and after the trip

Generally, the safest time to travel during pregnancy is the second trimester, when you are 13 to 28 weeks pregnant. You will probably feel your best and you will be in the least danger of having a miscarriage or premature labor. Avoid traveling long distances from home later in pregnancy. If labor starts before your due date, it's good to be close to home.

If you have any medical or pregnancy problems, your healthcare provider may advise against traveling while you are pregnant.

What are the general guidelines for travel during pregnancy?

- See your healthcare provider before you leave on your trip.
- Ask your provider if you will need any prenatal care visits while you are traveling, and if so, where you might go for prenatal care.
- Take a copy of your prenatal record with you.
- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes and loose-fitting clothes.
- Eat healthy meals and snacks. Meals may be unpredictable while traveling. Carry snacks with you. Eat enough fiber in your meals to avoid constipation.
- Drink plenty of water. Carry a water bottle with you.
- Do not take any medicines, including prescription and nonprescription medicines, supplements, and herbal remedies, without your healthcare provider's permission.
- Get up and walk often while you are traveling. Walking and moving your arms improves blood flow in your body. This prevents blood clots from forming in the legs and pelvis.
- Get enough sleep and rest. Sleep on a firm mattress.
- Take your own pillow with you. It may help you sleep better.
- Make sure you and your baby's health insurance will be accepted where you are traveling.
- If you have to sit for a long time, point and flex your feet often.

- After a long flight or other travel, try to lie down with your feet up for at least 30 minutes if you had to sit for a long time.
- Use wheeled suitcases or a wheeled luggage carrier to help with your luggage. This will avoid extra strain on your body and will allow you to get around much easier.
- Keep your travel plans as flexible as possible. Problems might develop at the last minute and you might have to cancel your trip. Unless it is absolutely necessary, do not plan any trips during the third trimester of your pregnancy.

What are the guidelines for traveling by car?

- Always wear a seat belt. A seat belt is safe for both you and the baby when worn properly. If the seat belt is only a lap belt, place it below your belly. If you have a shoulder and lap belt, place the lap portion under your belly and the shoulder belt across your shoulder and between your breasts. Be sure that the seat belt fits snugly. Air bags are safe but you must also wear the seat belt. The gas used in air bags won't hurt you or the baby.
- Adjust your seat as far from the dashboard or steering wheel as possible.
- Try to avoid riding in a car more than 6 hours each day. Stop every 1 to 2 hours for exercise, such as walking.
- If you are in an accident, you should go to an emergency room right away to get checked and make sure you and your baby are fine.
- Motorcycle travel should be avoided during pregnancy.

What if I am traveling by bus or train?

- When you are traveling by train, get up and walk every hour or two. You may have less opportunity to walk every couple of hours if you travel by bus. Take advantage of any stops the bus or train makes to get exercise.
- Take an extra cushion to use for back support and use the foot rest so that your knees are slightly raised.

Are there special concerns for traveling by air?

Flying is usually a safe way to travel. Most domestic airlines will allow a pregnant woman to fly up to the 36th week of pregnancy if there are no problems with the pregnancy. Each airline has policies regarding pregnancy and flying. Check with your airline when you reserve your tickets to see if you need to complete any medical forms.

Going through airport scanners during pregnancy does not seem to cause any risk to your baby or the pregnancy.

Suggested guidelines for traveling by air are:

- Try to get an aisle seat at the bulkhead (the wall that separates first class from coach) or exit aisle to have the most space and comfort. For a smoother ride, you may prefer a seat over the wing in the midplane section.

- During smooth flights, walk every half hour. Flexing and stretching your ankles often will also help avoid swelling. Support stockings can also help.
- Wear a seat belt below your belly whenever you are in your seat.
- Wear layered clothing because the temperature in the cabin may change during the flight.
- Drink plenty of fluids. The air in the plane can be very dry.
- Eat small meals to help avoid air sickness. Avoid foods and drinks that may give you gas. If you want a special meal on the plane, you can usually order one in advance.

Are there any problems with traveling by boat?

Seasickness is a concern for many people traveling by sea. Your healthcare provider may recommend medicine that helps prevent motion sickness and is safe during pregnancy. You might also try acupressure wristbands.

Medical services on a ship are very limited. If you are going on a cruise, check with the cruise line to find out what types of regulations and restrictions there are for pregnant women. Also ask about what kinds of medical facilities are available on the ship and in ports of call.

What are the guidelines for traveling internationally?

If you are planning to travel to another country, talk to your healthcare provider about it to see if it is safe for you. If it is safe, your provider will let you know what you should do before you leave and when you arrive at your destination. You may want to register with an American Embassy or Consulate after you arrive. It is important to make sure you have had all the shots you need for the countries you are planning to visit. Some immunizations cannot be given to pregnant women.

Make sure your health insurance is valid abroad. Check that the policy covers a newborn if you were to give birth during your travels.

Be especially cautious about what you eat in countries where traveler's diarrhea might be a problem. Diarrhea can cause dehydration and reduce the blood flow to the placenta and your baby.

- Do not drink untreated water and do not have ice cubes in your drinks.
- Avoid buying food and drinks from street vendors.
- Eat only foods that are cooked and still hot and fruits and vegetables that you peel yourself.
- Do not eat raw or partially cooked fish or shellfish, including such dishes as ceviche. Fully cooked fish and shellfish are safe.
- Brushing your teeth with toothpaste and untreated water is usually safe. Most toothpastes contain antibacterial substances. Do not swallow the water.
- Carbonated soft drinks and water and bottled water without ice are usually safe.
- Avoid uncooked dairy products. Make sure the milk you drink is pasteurized.

- Ask your healthcare provider what medicines are safe to take if you do get diarrhea when you are pregnant.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has an International Travelers Hotline for information on disease and world travel. The phone number is (800) 232-4636. The CDC travelers' health Web site is <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>.

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