

WELLNESS EXCHANGE

July 2015 Newsletter

How to Have a Healthy Vacation

This summer, whether traveling across country or around the world, you'll have a more enjoyable vacation if you plan ahead to stay healthy.



"While you can't prevent every health problem, there's much you can do to keep you and your family healthy when you're away from home," says Elizabeth M. Whelan, M.P.H. Sc.D., President of the American Council on Science and Health in New York City.

Dr. Whelan suggests keeping the following health and safety tips in mind.

Pack Your Medications

In addition to packing a small first-aid kit, be sure to pack your health insurance card, a copy of your eyeglass prescription, copies of prescriptions for any medicines and the addresses and phone numbers of all your physicians.

"If you have a chronic health problem, such as diabetes or heart disease, you may also want to carry a medical summary prepared by your doctor that includes an EKG," Dr. Whelan says. "You should wear an identifying bracelet or necklace if you have life-threatening allergies to medications or a medical condition such as asthma, diabetes or seizure disorder that could be rapidly problematic."

You should also bring a supply of any medicine you take routinely. "It's particularly important to bring an adequate supply of your prescription medicines if you're traveling abroad," Dr. Whelan says. "Drug names, doses and availability differ in other countries, and in some parts of the world, drug safety and effectiveness may not be up to U.S. standards."

Packing a supply of over-the-counter remedies for common problems also can help. These include a pain reliever, an antacid, a laxative, an anti-diarrheal, an antihistamine and a cough/cold remedy.

If you're traveling by air, put your prescription drugs in your carry-on bag. If you're traveling with young children, make sure all drugs are in containers with child-resistant caps. "It may be difficult to keep medicine out of reach the way you would at home," Dr. Whelan says.

Prevent Motion Sickness

Nine of ten people suffer from motion sickness at some time in their lives. If you're prone to it, the following precautions can reduce your symptoms:

- Travel where there's the least motion: on a ship's deck or amidships, in a car's front seat and over a plane's wing.
- Don't watch the waves when you're on a boat; look at the scenery when traveling on land. Keep your eyes fixed on the horizon.
- Eat and drink in moderation the night before you travel.
- Avoid tobacco smoke and intense chemical and food odors.
- Take over-the-counter (OTC) motion sickness medications such as Dramamine or Bonine as directed on the label.

Take Pepto-Bismol

Many international travelers suffer from diarrhea. Carefully selecting food and beverages can help prevent the condition. In general, cooked foods are safer than raw vegetables, fruit and seafood. The safest drinks are hot coffee, hot tea and bottled soft drinks. Avoid beverages with ice, fruit drinks and milk.

Four evenly divided daily doses of bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol) may help prevent some gastrointestinal infections.

"If you get diarrhea, take an appropriate OTC medicine and consume lots of bottled water and non-caffeinated soft drinks to prevent dehydration," Dr. Whelan says. "Seek medical attention if the condition continues longer than a day or two, or if you have a high fever or blood in your stool."

Keep Immunizations Up to Date

Make sure that your immunizations are up to date. Travelers to developing or non-industrialized countries should consider receiving immunizations for hepatitis A. Countries in the tropics may require other immunization. For a list of recommendations, check with your state's Department of Health or the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>).

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Insect and Spider Bites

Bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets, mosquitoes, flies, spiders, chiggers, ticks, gnats and other insects can all produce painful stings or bites. Most insect bites are harmless, but some can be very dangerous, even fatal.



Symptoms

It may be difficult to determine if you have been bitten or stung -- and by what. The reaction to minor bites is usually confined to the area around the bite. It may be red or have slight swelling. It may itch. Pain and swelling usually improve in 24 hours.

Swelling can vary from a small dot to half an inch in size. A large swelled area doesn't mean you are allergic to insect bites. The size of the swelling doesn't necessarily mean the bite is serious. Mosquito and gnat bites near the eye or ear can become very swollen. It also is not unusual for glands to become swollen as a reaction to insect bites.

Dangerous, life-threatening reactions to insect bites occur throughout the body usually within 20 minutes following the bite. The reaction appears on a part of the body separate from the sting site. Dangerous reactions include:

- Hives, intense itching or swelling all over the body
- Shortness of breath or wheezing
- Swelling of the throat that causes difficulty swallowing
- Nausea, stomach cramping or vomiting
- Weakness, dizziness or fainting
- Drop in blood pressure
- Shock or unconsciousness

First Aid

- **Remove the stinger** when stung by a bee, wasp, hornet, or yellow jacket. Scrape over the stinger (which looks like a splinter) with a credit card, fingernail, knife blade or other rigid object. Don't try to pull it out with your fingers or a tweezers; you might end up squeezing more venom into the skin.
- **Wash the site of the bite** and the surrounding area thoroughly with soap and water.
- **Apply cold quickly.** Cool compresses or ice packs will help ease the pain and prevent swelling from most insect bites. The longer you wait to apply a cold treatment, the less benefit it will have. Leave on for no more than 20 minutes at a time to avoid frostbite.
- **Don't scratch that itch.** Apply calamine lotion, hydrocortisone cream or baking soda and water. Take Benadryl (an antihistamine) if itching or more local swelling occurs. Benadryl will help reduce late-appearing symptoms but is not an effective emergency treatment. It can also cause sleepiness or hyperactivity in children.

Special Care for Children With Insect Bites

- Trim a child's nails to prevent trauma from scratching.
- Protect babies from insects, especially those under one year, because they can't swat them away.
- Note that bites on young children and babies will be more swollen in general and may form hard lumps that last for several months.

Using Insect Repellents

DEET, and two other products approved for use in 2005, picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus, are effective insect repellents

- Be careful when using DEET on children. Use low concentrations (no more than 10 percent) and apply lightly no more than twice a day. Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Avoid contact with DEET products on your mouth, eyes and open wounds by washing it off your hands after applying.
- Citronella comes in lotions, sprays and candles but offers limited protection against some mosquitos.
- Repellents are less effective in higher temperatures because they evaporate.

Prevention for People with Serious Reactions to Bee Stings

People who have had a serious reaction to a bee sting can take the following steps to prevent a serious reaction in the future:

- Carry a bee-sting kit at all times. A doctor can prescribe one and show you how to use it. These kits contain injectable adrenaline, also called epinephrine, which can be life-saving.
- Carry a card or wear a bracelet that alerts others to the condition.

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