



# 7 Tips for the Pregnant Traveller

If you have an uncomplicated pregnancy, it's most likely safe for you to travel so if you decide to book your tickets and hop on the next flight out, here's what you need to know.

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**B**efore you organise your trip, read up on pregnancy and health. Find a doctor, preferably one who has travelled or deals with travellers, and ask their advice.

## 1 The Safety Issue

First things first – before you book your trip check if it is safe for you to fly, now that you're pregnant. There is currently no evidence that flying is harmful to a healthy pregnant

woman and her baby provided that the pregnancy has been straightforward and uncomplicated, explains Dr Tan Eng Loy, consultant, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Singapore General Hospital.

Some pregnant women also may be concerned that the changes in atmospheric pressure and the drop in humidity may be harmful during air travel. Certainly, there can be an increased risk of discomfort due to leg swelling from fluid retention, nasal

congestion (which can lead to ear problems with the drop in air pressure) and pregnancy sickness made worse by motion sickness. However, there is no evidence that air travel causes early labour or the waters to break early provided that the pregnancy had been uncomplicated, explains Dr Tan.

## 2 Check Out The Airline's Policy

Different airlines have different policies when it comes to air travel

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during pregnancy advises Dr Tan. In general, airlines will ask you for a letter stating when your baby is due and confirming that you are fit to travel if you are over 28 weeks pregnant. As a pregnant woman, there is an increased risk of going into labour after 37 weeks and most airlines will not allow women to fly once their pregnancies are above 37 weeks. There are others who may not allow pregnant women to fly even earlier, for example, once their pregnancies are above 34 weeks. Therefore, it is important to check with the airlines before you fly.

## 3 Choose Your Seat Wisely

It is better to choose seats with more leg room, and an aisle seat if possible, explains Dr Watt Wing Fong, specialist in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and consultant, Raffles Women's Centre. Pregnant women have a higher risk of deep vein thrombosis (condition whereby blood clots in the veins), so having more leg room allows easier stretching and leg exercises. Having an aisle seat might also be more convenient as pregnant women tend to go to the toilet more often.

## 4 Get Medical Clearance

Usually the airlines will require a doctor's letter certifying fitness to fly. The certification may be required as early as 20 to 24 weeks, though it may vary with different

airlines, explains Dr Watt. For a woman who has either a pre-existing medical condition or a condition that complicates pregnancy, it is even more important to seek advice from a doctor and to get a “fit-to-travel” letter.

## 5 What's Your Destination?

A short haul flight is preferable during pregnancy as a long flight may cause backaches, leg cramps and increase the risk of deep vein thrombosis due to prolonged sitting, explains Dr Wendy Teo Shun Hui, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital. The cut-off gestation for flights may also be different

depending on the location. Generally, for short flights, it may be okay to travel up to 36 weeks. For longer flights, it is best to travel before 32 weeks.

## 6 The Effects of Flying

The cabin of the air plane is pressurised to a safe level so that our body adjusts to air pressure changes well. One may however experience more motion sickness when pregnant and the pregnant mother's blood tend to be thicker and as such easily clots, advises Dr Teo. Pregnant mothers are at a higher risk of blood clot formation in the leg veins when sitting too long.

## 7 Packing for Your Trip

It is good to pack the usual first aid medication. In addition, says Dr Teo, you may want to bring along your usual supplements for the pregnancy. For long flights, it is a good idea to get a pair of pressure stockings to reduce the risk of deep vein thrombosis. Don't forget medications for motion sickness, flu and diarrhoea that are safe to take during pregnancy. Comfortable loose clothing will be good as well. [M](#)

## KEEP IN MIND

Dr Tan Eng Loy gives a list of dos and don'ts you need to look out for when travelling:

### The Dos

- ✓ Rest and eat well
- ✓ Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration especially on prolonged flights and in hot climates
- ✓ Carry your own water (bottled or boiled) if possible especially if your destination has poor access to clean water
- ✓ Move around plenty if you are on a long-haul flight
- ✓ Wear compression stockings to avoid DVT on prolonged journeys
- ✓ On prolonged journeys, try to make “pit-stops” to stretch your legs and move around
- ✓ Enjoy yourself doing things that you are comfortable with
- ✓ Be cautious when choosing transport – four-wheelers (e.g. cars) are safer and more comfortable than two-wheelers which can be poorly balanced and may give you a backache! Always wear a seat belt

### The Don'ts

- ✗ Avoid “outside” or “street” food as they may be unhygienic and cause stomach upsets or serious infections
- ✗ Avoid in engaging in high risk or strenuous physical activities e.g. bungee-jumping, roller coaster rides, rafting
- ✗ Avoid travelling to destinations that may be affected during your time of travel by natural disasters (e.g. flood, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes etc.). Not only is there a risk of being affected directly, your travel plans are likely to be disrupted. Supplies of clean food and water may also be difficult to access in these situations