

## Travel tips for seniors

All travellers should plan carefully to ensure their health and safety while away. However, older people have a few extra concerns.

### **Pre-trip planning**

Suggestions include:

- Consult with your travel agent for suggestions. For example, many tour operators specialise in accommodating the needs of travelling seniors.
- Find out about the medical facilities in the areas you will be visiting.
- Research important factors such as climate, language and culture. Buy a guide book and read it before you go.
- Make arrangements for wheelchairs, guide dogs and seating needs well in advance.
- Organise travel insurance with pre-existing illness cover if needed.
- If you are concerned about your health, arrange to go on a package tour.

### **Reciprocal health care agreements**

Australia has a reciprocal health care agreement with some countries, which means emergency care is available. Non-emergency health care is only offered if delaying medical attention until returning home is unreasonable. Check with Medicare for an up-to-date list of countries participating in reciprocal health care agreements. Remember that travel health insurance is still needed.

### **Pre-trip medical check-ups**

Suggestions include:

- Consult with your doctor for a complete medical check-up. This is especially important if you have coronary heart disease, hypertension or any other chronic condition, or if you have recently undergone surgery or experienced a heart attack.
- Discuss any particular health concerns you may have, such as dietary changes and the possible impact of different eating habits on your specific condition.
- People with diabetes will need medical advice on how to safely stagger their medications to fit a different time zone.
- Consider having your flu and pneumonia vaccinations before you go on your trip.
- If you intend travelling to areas where infectious diseases are present, make sure you are fully vaccinated.
- Visit your dentist for a check-up.
- Visit any other health care providers you consult with on a regular basis, such as your optometrist.

### **Regular medications**

Suggestions include:

- Some medications that are legal in Australia may be prohibited overseas. Contact the Australian embassies in the countries you intend visiting to check.
- Take enough regular medication with you to last the entire trip. Some drugs may not be available overseas.
- You may like to consider a written and signed note from your doctor explaining the purpose of your medications, just in case.
- If you are taking large amounts of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medication with you, then you will need to take a letter of explanation from your doctor.
- If you are taking large amounts of over-the-counter medication with you, then you will need to take a letter of explanation from your chemist.

- If you buy medications overseas, remember that the dosages may be different to the brands you are familiar with.
- If the medication you regularly take requires syringes (such as insulin-dependent diabetes), take enough syringes to last the trip.
- When overseas, wear a medical alert bracelet or pendant which contains your medical details to inform others of your medical complaint in case you need urgent help. Your doctor should be able to advise you about the options available.

### **Your luggage**

Suggestions include:

- Make sure your carry-on bag contains everything you will need for the duration of the flight.
- Include a medical kit in your carry-on bag. Items to consider include regular medications, painkillers, antacids and band-aids.
- It might be a good idea to take along a pillbox with compartments for different days of the week. Being away from home (and your usual routine) could make you more likely to forget to take your medication.
- Pack a spare pair of glasses.
- It may be easier on your back if you use a suitcase with wheels.

### **Deep vein thrombosis and 'economy class syndrome'**

Coronary heart disease, obesity and sitting still for extended periods of time are known risk factors for the development of blood clots in the veins of the legs. This condition is known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Some researchers believe that long haul flights can be a risk factor in susceptible people. Suggestions on how to reduce the small risk of DVT while flying include:

- Consult with your doctor before flying. They may recommend that you take half an aspirin (150mg) on the day of the flight, and you may be advised to use elasticised stockings for the flight.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks.
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Take strolls up and down the aisles when possible.
- Avoid sitting with your legs crossed.
- Perform leg and foot stretches and exercises while seated.

### **Taking care of yourself while on holidays**

Suggestions include:

- Allow an easy day or two to recover from jet lag. Remember that the effects of jet lag may be lessened if you fly west instead of east.
- If you are unsure of the water supply, drink bottled water.
- To reduce the risk of food poisoning, avoid food buffets, seafood, undercooked meats, peeled and raw fruits and vegetables, and unpasteurised dairy products. Don't buy food from street vendors.
- Don't draw up a jam-packed itinerary for each and every day of your holiday – arrange for plenty of rest breaks, particularly in hot weather.
- Wear thongs in communal showers to reduce the risk of infectious diseases (like warts and tinea).
- Pack condoms and practise safe sex.
- Seniors cards are only supposed to offer benefits within your home State, but flashing the card at museums and other attractions may get you a cheaper entry ticket.
- Travellers' diarrhoea may reduce the effectiveness of your medications. Consult with a doctor if you have diarrhoea for more than one day. Your Australian embassy can provide you with a list of doctors.

### **Safety suggestions**

Thieves and pickpockets may consider older people as easy targets. Suggestions include:

- Don't travel around at night.
- Don't wear expensive jewellery on obvious display.

- Wear valuables (such as traveller's cheques and credit cards) on a belt worn under the clothes and next to the skin.
- Consider carrying a 'dummy' wallet holding a small amount of cash. If you are directly confronted by a mugger, you can hand over the dummy wallet and avoid further distress.
- Carry with you at all times the contact details of the Australian embassy. If your city doesn't have an Australian embassy, find out which other country's embassy is available to help you, such as the British embassy.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Travel agent
- Airline
- Australian embassies
- Medicare Tel. 132 011 (local call rate)
- Medicare Australia Tel. 132 011 (local call rate)

### **Things to remember**

- See your doctor for a complete check-up, particularly if you have a chronic medical condition.
- If you are taking large amounts of medication with you, then you will need to take a letter of explanation from your doctor.
- Organise travel insurance with pre-existing illness cover if needed.
- If you are concerned about your health, arrange to go on a package tour.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

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