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Travel tips for seniors

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Summary

- 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.

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

Pre-trip planning for seniors

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 healthcare agreements for seniors

Australia has a reciprocal healthcare agreement with some countries, which means emergency care is available. Non-emergency healthcare 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 healthcare agreements. Remember that travel health insurance is still needed.

Pre-trip medical check-ups for seniors

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 healthcare providers you consult with on a regular basis, such as your optometrist.

Regular medications for seniors

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 should obtain a written and signed note from your doctor detailing the prescribed medications you are taking with you.
- If you are taking over-the-counter medication with you, then you should ask your doctor to add these to the list of prescribed medications.
- 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 that 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 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. Sometimes a self-administered injection of heparin is required.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks and 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 practice 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 for travelling seniors

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)

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.

[References](#)

- *Travel health, Travelling well*, 2009, Smartraveller, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Commonwealth of Australia, Barton, ACT. [More information here.](#)

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Travel health basics

- [Medical tourism and insurance](#)
[People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it's a booming industry worldwide. People...](#)
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- [Overseas travel – health tips](#)
[The most common travel-related illnesses are gastrointestinal diseases from poorly prepared foods or untreated water...](#)
- [Travel safety tips](#)
[You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed while travelling by taking a few simple precautions...](#)
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[Safe sex is sexual contact that doesn't involve the exchange of semen, vaginal fluids or blood between partners...](#)
- [Who provides immunisations in Victoria](#)
[Immunisations in Victoria are provided by local councils, GPs and specially qualified nurses in medical clinics and community health services, some Maternal and Child Health nurses, travel clinics and...](#)
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[If you are travelling overseas, check with your doctor well in advance to find out what immunisations you need...](#)

Getting vaccinated

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[Influenza immunisation is recommended for people in known high risk groups...](#)
- [Measles](#)
[Measles can cause serious and sometimes fatal complications, including pneumonia and brain inflammation...](#)
- [Hepatitis](#)
[Hepatitis is an umbrella term for several diseases that affect the liver...](#)
- [Typhoid and paratyphoid](#)
[Almost every Australian case of typhoid or paratyphoid fever is caught overseas...](#)
- [Travel health - yellow fever immunisation](#)

[If you are travelling or passing through areas infected with yellow fever, some countries require you to be vaccinated...](#)

- [Tuberculosis \(TB\)](#)

[Tuberculosis is spread when a person with an active infection coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes...](#)

- [Who provides immunisations in Victoria](#)

[Immunisations in Victoria are provided by local councils, GPs and specially qualified nurses in medical clinics and community health services, some Maternal and Child Health nurses, travel clinics and...](#)

Mosquito prevention

- [Mosquitoes can carry diseases](#)

[You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home...](#)

- [Mosquitoes - mozzie-proof your holiday a checklist](#)

[Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from spoiling your holiday. Mosquitoes can carry diseases be prepared and avoid mosquito bites...](#)

- [Malaria](#)

[Travellers who visit malarial locations should avoid mosquito bites and take anti-malarial drugs...](#)

- [Dengue virus disease](#)

[Dengue virus disease \(dengue fever, or 'dengue'\) is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes in many tropical and subtropical parts of the world...](#)

- [Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist](#)

[Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites...](#)

- [Murray Valley encephalitis](#)

[The only protection from Murray Valley encephalitis \(MVE\) is to avoid mosquito bites...](#)

- [Ross River virus disease](#)

[Most people recover from Ross River virus disease, although some people have symptoms for a year or more...](#)

- [Buruli ulcer](#)

[Since the ulcer gets bigger with time, early diagnosis and prompt treatment of Bairnsdale disease can keep skin loss to a minimum...](#)

- [Barmah Forest virus disease](#)

[Barmah Forest virus \(BFV\) disease can cause joint inflammation and pain, fatigue and a rash of variable appearance. A full recovery can be expected. Most people recover completely within six months...](#)

- [West Nile virus](#)

[All disease-carrying mosquitoes breed in water or require water to enable eggs to hatch...](#)

- [Beat the Bite](#)

[Beat the Bite is a Victorian government health campaign to highlight awareness of the risk of mosquito-borne diseases in Victoria. Find resources to be printed and shared along with videos that tell...](#)

- [Zika virus](#)

[Zika virus is a mosquito-borne virus. There is no cure, specific treatment or vaccine for Zika virus...](#)

Common conditions

- [Altitude sickness](#)

[Being young and fit doesn't reduce your risk of altitude sickness...](#)

- [Travelling with an allergy](#)

[If you have an allergy, visit your doctor before you travel, especially if you are at risk of a severe allergic reaction \(anaphylaxis\) or an asthma attack...](#)

- [Deep vein thrombosis](#)

[Long international flights are suspected of contributing to deep vein thrombosis in susceptible people...](#)

- [Motion sickness](#)

[Motion sickness may occur in anyone, but some people are particularly sensitive...](#)

- [Swimmer's ear](#)

[Swimmer's ear can be triggered by exposure to water or mechanical damage due to overzealous cleaning...](#)

- [Traveller's diarrhoea](#)

[The risk of traveller's diarrhoea is higher where sanitation and hygiene standards are poor...](#)

- [Fear of flying](#)

[About one in six people have a significant fear that prevents them from flying, so fear of flying is common...](#)

- [Food poisoning - prevention](#)

[You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...](#)

- [Jet lag](#)

[If you suffer badly from jet lag, it may be worthwhile considering a westerly travel route if possible...](#)

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[Even mild sunburn can cause permanent skin damage and may increase your risk of skin cancer...](#)

- [Holiday stress](#)

[Holidays are supposed to offer relaxation and recuperation, but some people find them disappointingly stressful...](#)

- [Asthma and travel](#)

[Before taking your trip, visit your doctor to make sure your asthma is under control well before you leave...](#)

Infectious diseases

- [Traveller's diarrhoea](#)

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- [Buruli ulcer](#)

[Since the ulcer gets bigger with time, early diagnosis and prompt treatment of Bairnsdale disease can keep skin loss to a minimum...](#)

- [Leptospirosis](#)

[Leptospirosis is a disease spread from animals to humans, caused by infection with the bacteria Leptospira...](#)

- [Zika virus](#)

[Zika virus is a mosquito-borne virus. There is no cure, specific treatment or vaccine for Zika virus...](#)

- [Ebola virus disease \(EVD\)](#)

[Ebola virus is a rare disease that can cause severe symptoms and can be life-threatening...](#)

- [Typhoid and paratyphoid](#)

[Almost every Australian case of typhoid or paratyphoid fever is caught overseas...](#)

- [Dengue virus disease](#)

[Dengue virus disease \(dengue fever, or 'dengue'\) is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes in many tropical and subtropical parts of the world...](#)

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- [Travel health - yellow fever immunisation](#)

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- [HIV](#)

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- [Tuberculosis \(TB\)](#)

[Tuberculosis is spread when a person with an active infection coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes...](#)

Travel first aid

- [Epilepsy - first aid and safety](#)

[Good seizure management is an important part of reducing the risks associated with epilepsy...](#)

- [Allergic reactions emergency first aid](#)

[Severe allergic reactions \(anaphylaxis\) and asthma attacks need urgent emergency first aid. In an emergency, always call triple zero \(000\)...](#)

- [Spiders](#)

[Australia has about 2,000 species of spider but most species are relatively harmless to humans...](#)

- [Drug overdose](#)

[Alcohol, medications, illegal drugs and some herbal remedies can all cause damage if an overdose is taken...](#)

- [Anaphylaxis](#)

[Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that requires urgent medical attention...](#)

- [Head and spinal injuries first aid](#)

[Head injuries can be serious and require urgent medical attention. A hard blow to the head from a fall, knock or assault can injure the brain, even when there are no visible signs of trauma to the...](#)

- [Asthma emergency first aid](#)

[Asthma attacks need urgent emergency first aid. In an emergency, always call triple zero \(000\)...](#)

- [Cardiopulmonary resuscitation \(CPR\)](#)

[CPR is a life-saving skill that everyone should learn from an accredited organisation...](#)

- [Mushroom poisoning](#)

[Contrary to popular belief, there is no home test that can distinguish between edible and poisonous varieties of wild fungi or mushrooms...](#)

- [First aid kits](#)

[Your first aid kit should be organised, properly stocked and available at all times...](#)

- [First aid basics and DRSABCD](#)

[Some knowledge of basic first aid can mean the difference between life and death...](#)

- [Poisoning and child safety](#)

[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)

- [Bites and stings – first aid](#)

[If you are bitten or stung by an insect or animal, apply first aid and seek medical treatment as soon as possible...](#)

Food safety

- [Food safety - eggs](#)

[To enjoy eggs safely - buy clean, keep cool and cook well...](#)

- [Fishing - eat your catch with care](#)

[People who fish in the Lower Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers need to be careful about eating their catch because of the risk of chemical exposure...](#)

- [Food safety when cooking](#)

[Most foods should be cooked to at least 75 °C to minimise the risk of food poisoning...](#)

- [Food safety outdoors](#)

[Food poisoning is a real risk when taking food outside the home, especially in warmer weather...](#)

- [Food safety when eating out](#)

[If you have any doubt about the safety of food when you're out, don't eat it...](#)

- [Food safety while travelling](#)

[Travelling, eating and drinking go together but unfortunately, traveller's diarrhoea and other food-related illnesses can sometimes come along for the ride...](#)

- [Food safety and storage](#)

[High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...](#)

- [Mushroom poisoning](#)

[Contrary to popular belief, there is no home test that can distinguish between edible and poisonous varieties of wild fungi or mushrooms...](#)

- [Food poisoning - prevention](#)

[You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...](#)

- [Don't let food poisoning ruin your summer \(slideshow\)](#)

[How to avoid food poisoning this summer...](#)

- [Food safety for summer celebrations \(video\)](#)

[In the hot weather there is a higher risk of food poisoning but if you follow some simple rules when you prepare, handle and store food it will significantly reduce your risk of getting sick...](#)

Travel and holidays throughout life

- [Breastfeeding and travel](#)

[Breastmilk protects your baby from illness and infection, so it is the safest drink for your baby while travelling...](#)

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[Partying at schoolies week can be fun, but you need to be aware of the risks, which can include accidents, robbery, violence and sexual assault...](#)

- [Pregnancy and travel](#)

[Travelling to developing nations is not encouraged during pregnancy, due to the risk of disease and the standard of medical facilities...](#)

- [Travelling with children](#)

[If your child is old enough, involve them in planning a trip so they can get excited about it...](#)

- [Travel tips for seniors](#)

[All travellers should plan carefully, but older people have a few extra concerns when travelling...](#)

- [Travel tips for women](#)

[Many countries have different ideas about how women should dress and behave, and your trip will be more enjoyable if you respect local expectations...](#)

Festivities and celebrations

- [Celebrations - Christmas Day the healthy way \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist, Veronica Graham shows us how to cook a light and healthy Christmas meal without overindulging. Whatever way you celebrate, there are ways to eat healthily...](#)

- [Celebrations - healthy birthday parties \(video\)](#)

[Birthday parties can be healthy as well as fun. Flip Shelton reports on some great ideas for healthy and tasty treats for your child's next birthday...](#)

- [Christmas – tips to reduce the stress](#)

[Christmas doesn't have to be a financial headache if you plan ahead...](#)

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Travel safety

- [Beaches and water quality](#)

[Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality \(such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant\) will help...](#)

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[Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency...](#)

- [Child safety in the car](#)

[Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries...](#)

- [Hot weather and child safety](#)

[Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration...](#)

- [How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat](#)

[Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others...](#)

- [Motor vehicle crashes](#)

[Motor vehicle crashes continue to be one of the biggest killers and causes of injury in Victoria...](#)

- [Partying safely – tips for parents](#)

[With a few simple plans in place, a good time can be had by all at a teenage party – even the parents...](#)

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[Safe driving is up to every individual on the road. You can be a safe driver by being alert and ready to take action at any time...](#)

- [Safe sex](#)

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[Many countries have different ideas about how women should dress and behave, and your trip will be more enjoyable if you respect local expectations...](#)

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- [Bird flu \(avian influenza\)](#)

The symptoms of bird flu in humans are similar to those of regular influenza...

- [Flu \(influenza\) – immunisation](#)

Influenza immunisation is recommended for people in known high risk groups...

- [Body mass index calculator for children and teenagers](#)

This calculator measures body mass index (BMI), which is a measure of body fat. It is only an approximate measure of the best weight for your health. The calculator can be used for anyone from two to...

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- [DFAT, Smartraveller - Travelling seniors](#)
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