

how to stay healthy abroad

by
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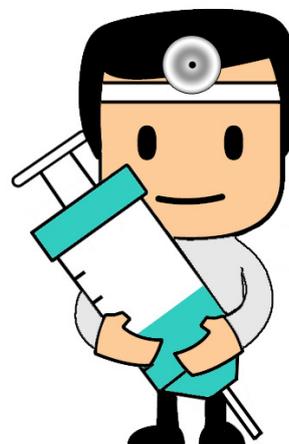
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Important note: I am not medically trained therefore cannot offer you medical advice, only opinion based on personal experience. For your own health, you should definitely consult a qualified medical practitioner before heading off travelling.

Jane Mclellan

Visit your GP / Travel Clinic

You should visit your GP / travel clinic at least six weeks before you plan to depart for your trip. When visiting, you should tell your doctor which countries you'll be visiting and let them know the types of activities you plan to do. Ideally, you should take a detailed itinerary with you as some health risks apply to certain country regions, but not others. Your doctor will then be able to advise you of any vaccinations or medication you'll need throughout your stay.



Note that though some vaccinations are free under the NHS, there are also a few that you may have to pay for.

When planning your trip you should check to see if any of the destinations you plan to visit require a certificate of vaccination, as some countries request this as part of their entry criteria. As an example, I recently visited Tanzania where I had to prove upon arrival that I had a yellow fever certificate. Your doctor should be able to help you with this, however I recommend double-checking countries' individual entry requirements against the information on official embassy websites.

It is always important to check if you are visiting a region where malaria is a risk, though again your doctor will advise you of this. You can also find great advice at www.malariahotspots.co.uk. If you *are* travelling to an area affected by malaria, then you will need to take malaria tablets. In many cases these can be expensive, but please don't be tempted to cut corners as a result of the price. It's really not worth it; Malaria is a horrible disease and is something that should be avoided at all costs. Not only can it make you seriously ill, it can massively disrupt or even ruin your travel plans if you are unlucky enough to contract it, so take care of yourself and stock up on tablets if they are required.

If you take any medication or prescribed contraceptives, ask your doctor if you can take sufficient quantities with you to last the whole duration of your trip. If it's not possible, your doctor should be able to advise you on where they can be purchased during your travels. If you are taking a large quantity of any medication with you, it's always worth getting a doctor's note to explain why you need it, as this may help to prevent any difficulties that could arise when passing through airport customs.

Wherever you're going I would recommend taking a small first aid kit with you. These can either be purchased whole (travel specific kits) or you can simply assemble one yourself. First aid kit essentials will vary depending on where you are going and what you intend to do. To give you a good idea of the bare necessities, in the next section you'll find a list of the basic essentials, which I take with me on all of my trips.

When packing your kit, and while travelling, you should always remember to keep your important medication in your hand luggage and not in your checked baggage. This ensures that you'll always have it with you; a blessing if your main luggage gets delayed or goes missing! For security reasons, any sharp objects such as scissors should always be packed in your main luggage when flying.

Diarrhoea

Upset tummy, sickness and diarrhoea are just a few of the common illnesses that most travellers experience. The squits, trots, Delhi Belly, whatever you call it, diarrhoea can be a real drag, and I have to say, it's the only thing aspect of travelling that I don't like. I have no patience when it comes to this kind of illness as I get frustrated when my trip is affected and my plans are delayed. To avoid this, I always try to do my best and not get sick in the first place! Some of the best ways to do this include:

- Carry an anti-bacterial hand gel with you and use it frequently. Some toilets overseas don't have soap. You can use this gel to wash your hands after going to the toilet and before eating.
- Ensure the local water is safe to drink. If it's not, or if you're not sure, drink bottled water. Check the seal is not broken. If this is not possible then make sure the water has been boiled and left to cool. You can also buy water purification tablets and iodine which makes water safe to drink. Make sure you read any instructions carefully.
- If the local water is unsafe then be careful not to swallow any when you brush your teeth or shower.
- Avoid ice in drinks unless you're completely sure that it's been made from safe/ treated water.
- As a general rule, stick to foods that have been cooked. Make sure any meat is cooked through.
- Make sure fruit and vegetables have been washed in safe water. If in doubt peel it and wash it yourself.
- Avoid all un-pasteurised dairy products.
- Think again about ordering seafood if you're a long way from water or the coast (and at the very least check where the food has come from). Seafood goes off very quickly - especially in hot weather.
- Equally, you should avoid eating raw or undercooked shellfish.
- When you first arrive in a new destination, be sure to introduce new foods to your body slowly. Let your body gradually adjust to its new diet and climate.
- Don't touch food that has been exposed to flies.
- Avoid cafés and restaurants that are empty or really quiet. I always get recommendations for the best places to eat from the staff at my accommodation.
- Street food is great, especially if you can see it being cooked fresh and right in front of you. Avoid food that has been left in the heat or has been out all day.
- Sometimes it's best to avoid meat all together, especially if you are unsure when or how it's been cooked, or if you don't know what animal it actually came from.

If you do get a tummy bug then try the following:

- Drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Take some re-hydration packs with you so that you can quickly replace lost electrolytes, vitamins and minerals.
- Eat a little food if you can, but keep it bland.

- Most diarrhoea normally goes within 36 hours. If the condition persists then visit a doctor or medical clinic.
- You can buy tablets like lmodium that can bung you up. I would only recommend taking these if you have to go on a long journey and won't have easy access to a toilet. If you do have a bug it is often best to get rid of it rather than keep it inside you, plus taking these tablets can make you constipated for a few days, which is not a pleasant experience.

Avoid Mosquitoes & Malaria

Mosquitoes are a common annoyance wherever you are in the world. I must be tasty because they never leave me alone! Although I'm always careful to keep doors and windows closed, as soon as my head hits the pillow, once again I'll hear the familiar buzz of a mozzie and I always end up getting nibbled!

Not only are mosquitoes annoying with their irritating buzz, they can also cause very itchy and sore bites. If that's not bad enough they can spread horrible diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. It's therefore best to prevent these little buggers from biting you in the first place. Below are some preventative measures:

- Use an insect repellent. I normally use some with DEET in it, as it's normally the most effective. Check out the travel section in your local chemists. You can buy roll-ons, sprays and lotions. Remember to take some out with you in the evening so that you can re-apply.
- Mosquitoes like to come out to play around dusk and dawn, so be sure to keep covered up and wear a long sleeved top and long trousers during these times.
- At bedtime, use a mosquito net if you know they are about. Mosquito nets are small and light to carry around and can be assembled quickly and easily. Mosquito nets should be impregnated with an insecticide.
- Use a smoke coil or a plug-in mosquito killer to deter mosquitoes.
- Some people say that taking Vitamin B tablets, garlic capsules or even marmite can help prevent you from being bitten. It's always worth a try and works for some people, but unfortunately not for me!
- If you are travelling to an area with a known malaria risk then remember to visit your doctor before you leave to stock up on malaria tablets.
- Malaria tablets are great, but they are not always 100% effective. For an example of this, remember that Cheryl Cole recently travelled to Tanzania, took her malaria tablets and still caught a very dangerous strain of the disease. If you start to feel unwell or experience fevers, during your trip or even after your return, please do get yourself checked out by a doctor. It's always better to be safe than sorry.

Safe Sex

I know I'm not your mum, so sorry if this sounds like a lecture. But if you do have sex during your travels, please look after yourself. Even if you don't intend to meet someone whilst travelling, you should nevertheless be prepared just in case you do. There is nothing wrong with having sex while travelling, but always ensure you stay safe, whilst having fun.

ALWAYS PRACTICE SAFE SEX! Not only will this help protect you against pregnancy, it will help protect you from HIV and AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted diseases. I would recommend packing some condoms before you leave home so you know they're of good quality and are manufactured by a reliable brand. Quality does vary around the world.

If you're off on a night out, take some condoms with you, even if you are not planning on sleeping with someone. You never know who you will meet and what you will want to get up to so it's best to have some just in case. Be safe and be prepared.

Don't overdo the booze. A common reason that some people have unprotected sex is because they have had too much to drink. Watch what you drink, and don't get so drunk that you don't know what you're doing. Be sensible and know your limits.

Have fun but stay safe. Sex is only fun if you are having a good time and if you are safe. Most people are careful when they go for a night out in the UK and have their own rules about who they are prepared to sleep with. These rules should also apply when you are travelling. Don't let your guard down. If you are going to go off with someone, make sure your friends know where you are, and who you are with.

No means no. Remember, you have the right to say no if you are unhappy with someone or feel uncomfortable with them. If you start to think that the person is acting strangely or being too full on, remove yourself from the situation immediately. Don't worry about being polite or wondering what they will think, just get yourself away. Find your friends or even a group of other travellers who you can sit with until you feel safe again.

That's it, lecture over!

Enjoy the sun safely

Travelling in warm climates is great and enables you to spend a lot of time outdoors, but it's important to take care when spending time in the sun.

I have white skin and lots of freckles so after ten minutes in the sun I start to burn. I've had sun stroke and sunburn several times during my travels and I can assure you it's not pleasant. The lobster look will never be fashionable and can cause so much damage to your skin, including skin cancer. Regardless of your skin type, be sure to take care in the sun and consider the following precautions:

- Use plenty of high protection sunscreen and apply regularly. I don't hit the beach with less than factor 30.
- Re-apply regularly, especially if you swim in the sea or are sweating bucket loads.



- Don't forget to apply extra sunscreen on your sensitive bits - ears, nose, neck, shoulders, feet, and girls remember your cleavage!
- Get yourself a sun hat and wear it. It doesn't matter if you look silly, it's better than missing a night out due to sunstroke.
- Avoid being out in the sun when it is at its strongest - between 11am and 3pm.
- Take extra care on boats, when around water and on snow slopes where the sun's rays are reflected, making them stronger. You might not think sunburn's an issue when you're at the top of a snow-capped peak but trust me, it is!
- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration - I aim to drink at least two litres a day, carrying a bottle around with me at all times and drinking continuously throughout the day.
- Avoid drinking alcohol in the sun, and if you do have a couple of bevies, compensate for it by drinking plenty of water in-between.

Other health and safety issues

There are loads more issues to consider, such as what to do if you cut yourself, or sprain an ankle. In such situations, the best thing is to check out any issues on the Internet, or go to a local clinic. Spider bites for example can be dangerous, and while most are fine, others will need treatment.

If you're in any doubt, go to a clinic. If everything is OK, then don't worry you'll just have wasted some time and gained peace of mind! If there are health dangers associated with your symptoms, you'll be glad to be safe rather than sorry.