

Travel Tips for When Sickness Hits



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Emily Jablon has suffered health issues time and time again during her travels around the world. The Austin, Texas, resident who co-founded the Million Mile Secrets travel blog with her husband, has experienced an allergic reaction to fish, come down with a fever and even passed out on the street — all while traveling outside the United States. With each situation, she learned valuable lessons that subsequently changed the way she travels.

With the flu rampant this year and outbreaks like the measles making headlines, all globetrotters could take a lesson in preparing for a travel-borne illness before it strikes. Jablon and several doctors weigh in.

Plan ahead

Thanks to her EpiPen, Jablon survived collapsing on the streets of Madrid. But along with an EpiPen, your first-aid kit should include items like a thermometer, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, antacid medication, vitamin C, B-complex, antihistamine medication and antibacterial ointment, according to Dr. Kristine Arthur, internist/family medicine physician at Orange Coast Memorial Medical Center.

You'll also want to have all your regular medications, as well as a list of the dosages for each that you can provide an area doctor if necessary. "Be sure to have extra prescriptions with you in case you lose your supply of medicine ... particularly when visiting countries with basic medical infrastructure or remote places," Jablon said. She also reiterated one of the cardinal rules of air travel: keep all your necessary medications in your carry-on.

The Transportation Security Administration does allow medications in pill or solid form in carry-ons, and you can carry liquid medications in excess of 3.4 ounces, but you're required to notify a TSA officer and it must be separated in a zip-close bag.

Some medications are not as easy to travel with, but can quickly be found at the drugstore or even provided by your hotel. All Library Hotel Collection properties, for example, have in-room humidifiers. And at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, a concierge will go to the pharmacy for you and arrange doctor visits if needed.

Many hotels also offer grab-and-go convenience stores or kiosks that sell prepared foods and other items, meaning you might only have to go as far as the lobby to get what you need. At the new Market Place at the Island Hotel in Newport Beach, California, guests can pick up a wide selection of medicines to help with allergies, headaches, fever and cold symptoms, and even better, travelers can call down and have them delivered to their rooms.

If you get sick

If, despite your best efforts, you start feeling under the weather, there are a few things you should do. Arthur advises checking your temperature immediately and asking yourself a few questions to determine why you're feeling green like "Did I eat anything new or unusual?" or "Did I interact with anyone who was sick?" Then, share these answers with a medical professional. Increase your fluids, especially clear, non-caffeinated drinks, and try to avoid extra sugars, candy and junk food. Take a nap, and if possible, ingest vitamin C or B-complex.

You can also look to your hotel for a bit of help. Several properties provide special menu items and offerings tailored to those experiencing less severe symptoms like nasal congestion, colds or even a mild flu. At Le Salon in the Windsor Court Hotel in New Orleans, you can get a cup of tea with honey, turmeric, cayenne and cinnamon, which contains antibacterial properties to relieve sore throats and congestion, while also helping to lower fevers and eliminate toxins.

Westin resorts offer SuperFoodsRx dishes on their menus, which are low-calorie meals loaded with antioxidant nutrients and energy. Spa treatments, such as those offered at the Biras Creek Resort in the British Virgin Islands, can also help alleviate symptoms. Try the spa's ayurvedic treatments to strengthen the body's immune system and fight infection, or choose a one- to three-day sinus treatment to open blocked air passages.

When over-the-counter medications aren't doing the trick, it might be time to seek medical care. Dr. Tom Horowitz, family practice physician at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, advised finding a local doctor if you have a rash, chest pain, shortness of breath, a significant headache, a fever above 100 degrees or gastrointestinal symptoms that last more than six hours.

The U.S. consulate can offer recommendations on where to seek medical attention if you're outside the U.S. And if you're within the country, Arthur recommended calling your health plan to find a provider. Urgent care can also be a good option for symptoms like fever, chills, cough or minor sprains or fractures, according to Arthur. If you can, keep your doctor back home abreast of your situation.

If you have to travel

If you do need to travel back home while you're still under the weather, limit your exposure to others and wash your hands frequently, Arthur said. Horowitz advised avoiding travel if you have a fever, cough or rash, and especially warned against plane travel for those with stomach, heart or lung problems.

For help at the airport, Jablon recommended asking for a wheelchair or shuttle to your gate, as staff are usually happy to accommodate. But if you're too sick to make it home at your scheduled flight time, you'll likely have to pay a change fee of \$150 to \$200, unless you're flying Southwest Airlines, in which case you'll only pay the difference in fare. Jablon also suggested using your frequent flier miles for emergency situations if you booked with an airline that imposes change fees.