

Tips On Flying With Children

McKenzie Pediatrics September 2008

Flying with children is an adventure by itself. Unfortunately, many parents do not adequately prepare themselves and their children for long flights. As a result, everyone ends up having a miserable experience. It doesn't need to be this way! We hope that the following tips help increase the likelihood you and your child will enjoy a happy journey.

Flying With Young Infants:

Flying with infants up to the age of 4 to 6 months is *usually* a low-stress experience. Infants this young tend to take frequent naps, and are often lulled to sleep by the drone of the engines. By 4 months, most infants are very social, and enjoy looking at the surrounding passengers. Everything in life is new and exciting to them, and flying is no exception.

Be sure to bring twice the number of **diapers and wipes** you think you'll need, in the event of an unexpected long layover. If your baby is formula-fed, bring plenty of powder for the trip there and back. Consider **pre-measuring the powder** into a few bottles before the trip, but remember not to fill them up with water until you have passed through airport security. You can also wait until you are on the plane to ask the flight attendants for water, which is usually stored at room temperature, which most babies prefer. If you pre-fill your bottles in the airport, fill them with cold water, and store them in a small cold sack or lunch bag brought along in the diaper bag.

If you are breastfeeding, be certain to pack along a **small blanket** if you wish to cover yourself and your baby while (s)he nurses. However you feed your baby, be certain to pack along a few **spit rags**.

The take-off is generally not a problem for baby and child ears. The descent, however, can be difficult. When the pilot comes over the intercom to tell you that the flight attendants are making their last run through the cabin, and to tell you of the weather at your destination airport, this means the gradual descent is beginning. This is a good time to feed your baby, or to insert a pacifier so that it can suck for the remainder of the flight.

Flying With Older Infants and With Toddlers:

There is no question that flying with children between the ages of 9 months and 2 years can be quite challenging. In addition to the advice given in the section on flying with young infants - all of which applies as well to this age group - parents need to make extra preparations to help ease the difficulty of flying with these busy and often demanding young children.

First off, the most magic bullet: **Cheerios**. Cheerios, or other similar small, healthy finger foods, can keep these young children busy for up to 20 minutes at a time. Breaking out the Cheerios at different times during the flight can buy some periods of peace and quiet for you and for your surrounding passengers. Be sure to only offer *original* Cheerios, as the other types are far less nutritious.

Next, be sure to pack lots of **novel activities**. Some ideas include: Colorforms™, a small MagnaDoodle™ or Etch-A-Sketch™, some sticker books, a felt activity board, a small foam shape puzzle, a small dry erase board with dry erase markers, and some new small and

lightweight books to look through. Be sure to pack enough activities for *both* the outbound and return flights, and be careful not to use up all your new activities on the first flight!

Pack a couple of sippie cups, and consider packing a small box of Crystal Light™ or Propel™ single-use flavor packs to add to the water you request from the flight attendant. Remember that there are *few kid-friendly drinks available on board*; your choices are limited to water, soda, and high-calorie fruit juices.

Pack some infant Motrin™ or Advil™ in case of painful ears, and be sure to determine the dosage for your young child's weight *prior* to traveling.

Flying With 2 to 5 Year-Olds

Most of the advice thus far also applies to this age group. Additional activities that can be packed include puzzles (buy 24- or 48-piece puzzles, and take the pieces out of the box and bring them in a Ziploc bag), coloring books (with crayons or color pencils...avoid bringing markers!), and Highlights™ or similar activity-based magazines.

Be sure to pack plenty of age-appropriate snack foods, such as Clif Z-Bars™, and even sticks of string cheese and fresh fruit slices in a small insulated lunch bag. For drinks, again consider bringing an **empty water bottle**, and single-use packets of Crystal Light™ or Propel™.

For children three and older, pack some sugar-free gum so that they can chew gum during the descent, in order to reduce or prevent any ear discomfort. Pack some *chewable* Motrin™ or Advil™ in case of painful ears, and be sure to determine the dosage for your child's weight prior to traveling. Do not pack liquid Motrin™ or Advil™, as the 4-ounce size of the bottles exceeds the 3-oz. TSA limit for liquids.

Flying With Older Children

Much of the advice given thus far also applies to older children. Additional activities that can be packed include some new magazines, lightweight paperback books, crossword puzzle or Sudoku books, a new game or two for their Nintendo DS™. Consider buying a hand-held electronic Scrabble™, Battleship™, or Wheel of Fortune™ game (usually \$15 or less). Small 100- or 200-piece puzzles packed in Ziploc bags are good time occupiers. Consider going to a craft store to find some lightweight craft activities (avoid activities with small round pieces that can easily roll off and get lost, such as beading). Consider packing a deck of cards, and a game of Uno™.

Again, have some ibuprofen handy in case of earaches. Pack a water bottle and some single-use flavor packets. Pack some favorite healthy snacks. And consider packing an **inflatable pillow** for each child, and a compact **lightweight blanket** as the passenger cabin can sometimes be quite cold.

Finally, bring plenty of **hand sanitizer**, in the 1-oz bottle size. Happy travels!

For MORE great information, especially regarding infants and sleep and crying during air travel, check out **www.KidsTravelDoc.com**

