

Tips for Traveling with Children This Holiday Season

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'Tis the season for traveling--with children. To help ease the sometimes-difficult task, here are some tips from Joseph Leaman, D.O., is a family medicine physician.

1. Are there ideal times of day to travel with children?

As far as ideal times of the day to travel, it depends on the children. If your children are early risers, it might be easier to travel earlier in the morning. If your children go to sleep easily, you could fly later in the evening so they sleep through the travel portion of your trip.

2. Snack-wise, what is best for kiddos to munch on while traveling?

I like to take snacks that the kids will enjoy and are healthy, but won't make too much of a mess. Great go-to snacks include carrots, string cheese, raisins, Multigrain Cheerios, dried fruit, Goldfish, Fig Newtons, and slices of fresh fruit and veggies. Things that I do not like taking on trips include candy bars or M&Ms. The reason for that is because they melt and make big messes. By eating well, you'll also avoid the big sugar crash that could lead to a meltdown.

3. Tips for preventing or helping plugged ears during flights?

Drink plenty of water throughout the flight. Drinking a lot of water is very important, not only because it encourages swallowing (which makes the Eustachian tubes open), but also because airplane air is dry, which thickens nasal mucus, making it more likely for the Eustachian tubes to become clogged. For children three years and older, I recommend lollipops, gummy bears or gum for popping your ears on flights. Starbursts or other chewy foods also help. It's recommended that babies nurse or drink a bottle during take off and landing to reduce ear popping.

4. Ways to keep germs at bay?

I recommend washing your hands often while traveling. Soap and water is still the tried and true method for preventing illness. You can also carry alcohol-based hand cleanser gels with you to use when soap and water is not easily accessible or available.

5. Ideas for keeping kids busy en route?

There are a lot of great activities to help keep their little hands busy on trips. Some examples include age-appropriate books, dry erase boards, pencil and paper, favorite toys, building blocks such as LEGOs, or electronics (tablets or readers). Make sure they are charged and in working order with safe games or downloaded videos before the trip. Many airlines include charging ports in the seats. You may also want to get a book about your destination that your kids can read, or you can brainstorm activities to do while at your destination.

Joseph Leaman, D.O., is a family medicine physician who has traveled quite a bit by car and airplane, both domestically and internationally. He's even moved cross country with his children three times. Dr. Leaman will be leading a talk about "Traveling With Children" on Monday, Dec. 19, at 9 a.m. at Mountain Vista Medical Center, which will address how to keep kids happy and healthy when traveling. To register, visit mvmedicalcenter.com or call 1-877-924-WELL (9355).