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Is air travel safe for an infant?

Answer From [Jay L. Hoecker, M.D.](#)

Air travel is appropriate for most infants. Before you fly with your baby, however, consider:

- **Your baby's age.** Your baby's doctor might discourage unnecessary air travel shortly after birth. Newborns have developing immune systems and air travel might increase their risk of catching an infectious disease. If you choose to travel with an infant, frequently wash your hands or use hand sanitizer and avoid contact with obviously ill travelers.
- **Your baby's ears.** Changing cabin pressure during a flight causes temporary changes in middle ear pressure, which can trigger ear pain. To help equalize the pressure in your baby's ears, offer your baby a breast, bottle or pacifier to suck on during takeoff and the initial descent. It might help to try to time your baby's feedings so that he or she is hungry during these times. If your baby has had ear surgery or an ear infection in the past two weeks, ask his or her doctor if it's OK to fly.

Also, airplane cabin noise levels are loud, especially during takeoff. Consider using cotton balls, noise-canceling headphones or small earplugs to limit your baby's exposure to this noise and make it easier for him or her to sleep.

- **Your baby's breathing.** During flight, air pressure in an aircraft cabin is lower than air pressure on land. This temporary change in oxygen level doesn't seem to pose problems for otherwise healthy babies. However, if your baby was born prematurely, has chronic heart or lung problems, or has upper or lower respiratory symptoms, talk to your baby's doctor before flying.
- **Your baby's safety seat.** Most infant car seats are certified

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for air travel. Although airlines typically allow infants to ride on a caregiver's lap during flight, the Federal Aviation Administration recommends that infants ride in properly secured safety seats. If you choose not to purchase a ticket for your infant, ask about open seats when you board the plane — in case one can be assigned to your infant.

[The Mayo Clinic Diet Online](#)

Don't be tempted to give your baby an over-the-counter medication, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl, others), to encourage sleep during the flight. The practice isn't recommended, and sometimes the medication can have the opposite effect.

With

[Jay L. Hoecker, M.D.](#)

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