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# Traveling with Your Breastfed Child? Enjoy the Trip!



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If you've had your baby, adjusted to life as parents, gotten breastfeeding off a good start, and now you've decided it might be time to take a trip ...

how? Is it even possible to travel with a baby and enjoy the time away from home? Yes! Armed with some knowledge and advance planning, you and your growing family can successfully take a journey that everyone will enjoy.

## WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

If you're in the United States, you might want to inform yourself about the laws that protect your right to breastfeed anywhere you are otherwise legally permitted to be. In most states, you will encounter no problem, but familiarizing yourself with the law may give you the confidence you need to stand up for yourself if your right to breastfeed your baby is questioned on your trip.

The right to breastfeed anywhere, anytime is protected, for instance, by equality legislation in the UK, the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** ([http://www.infactcanada.ca:80/breastfeeding\\_rights.htm](http://www.infactcanada.ca:80/breastfeeding_rights.htm)), and by **U.S. state laws** (<http://www.ncsl.org:80/research/health/breastfeeding-state-laws.aspx>). In **Australian Federal Law** (<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/11991>) breastfeeding is a right, not a privilege. In **Scotland** (<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/23899.aspx>) it is an offence in law to stop a child being fed milk (breast milk or artificial milk) in a public place or on licensed premises. Printing out the text of the law and keeping it in your diaper bag may be just what you need if you are confronted or challenged for breastfeeding in public. Most people just aren't going to confront you.

## TRAVELING BY AIR

I've had occasion to travel by air with all three of my nurslings, from when they were as young as seven weeks old. While there will be many aspects of the trip you cannot control (flight delays, weather, the passengers seated around you), there are some things you do have choices about. In my experience, providing first for my own comfort and for my baby's was the most important consideration in making the trip less stressful.

Your first strategy for maximizing your comfort during air travel is to book your seats early. By doing so, you will have the best choice of time of travel, connecting flights, and seat location, all of which will have an impact on your trip. Keep in mind that long-haul flights (international) will almost always require you to purchase a seat for your baby, but domestic rules generally allow children under the age of two to travel on a parent's lap.

What works for one family might not work for another, so think about your baby's temperament when choosing flights. Does he sleep at the same time, reliably, each day? For some babies, flying during naptime works terrifically, because they sleep for most of the flight, but for others, the flight is so exciting, they miss their nap and are cranky for the rest of the trip. Many families prefer direct flights to those with a layover, because the complications of moving through airports and finding food are reduced.

However, the benefit to a travel day broken up by a layover is that children don't have to be cooped up in a small space without a break, and can run, shout, and spread out during the layover. Obviously, the age of your child at the time of the trip will matter a lot. Sometimes, you don't get a choice of flight parameters, so you work with whatever you get.

Choose comfortable clothing for your trip. Many moms prefer a long layer underneath, such as a nursing tank, with a cardigan or other loose-fitting top over it. Your baby may want to nurse more often than usual, and you'll be in public for many hours, even if you're not traveling that far. Practicing with your travel clothes at a La Leche League meeting or other familiar place may help you feel more confident if you're not already accustomed to breastfeeding in public.

As far as seat selection goes, decide where you'll be most comfortable. Some mothers prefer to nurse a baby in the window seat, while others need the elbow-room offered by the aisle. Keep in mind that car seats are required to go in the window seat, so as not to obstruct the quick exit of any passengers in your row in case of emergency. And, a word about whether you are allowed to breastfeed your baby in your seat on an airplane: there have been some scary news reports in recent years of mothers being ordered to stop nursing their babies before take-off or at other times during the flight. Before your flight, request a copy of the airline's policy on breastfeeding, print it out, and bring it with you on your trip. If you are confronted by a misinformed flight attendant, present her with her airline's policy, keeping in mind that many "express" flights are actually run by smaller subsidiary airlines to the major airline from which you've purchased your ticket (so make sure the smaller airline subscribes to the same policies).

While I have never been told not to breastfeed my baby on an airplane, I have been asked to comply with safety standards, most often regarding the position of my child. Reminding yourself that your goal is to arrive safely at your destination, not necessarily to educate along the way, may help you. Feel free to write letters of education once you're home if you were treated inappropriately.

Many families get stressed about how they're going to schlep everything through an airport ... car seat, stroller, luggage, diaper bag, and the baby! If you're flying to meet family and your baby is small enough to stay on your lap during the flight, perhaps you can order a car seat online and have your family install it in their car before they pick you up from the airport. However, if you'll be renting a car, the car seats offered by rental agencies can be less-than-adequate from a cleanliness standpoint (and I'm being generous!). Car seats can be checked and not counted against your baggage allowance, or checked at the gate as you're boarding your flight. Check with your airline before your trip for specific details.

Remember that transportation safety regulations will prohibit your passing through security with drinks or snacks, and most of what you can purchase in the airport gate area is both expensive and better suited for older children and adults. Lucky for you, you're breastfeeding! No matter how long your day goes, your milk will sustain and satisfy your baby.

Wearing your baby can make your journey infinitely easier! A wrap sling was ideal for me. I put it on before we left the house and just wore my baby in it as much as she wanted. All three of my babies were used to being worn at home, so traveling with the sling kept them comfortable and kept my hands free. I had to take the baby out and remove the sling to pass through security checkpoints, but other than that, the sling was an indispensable part of our travel. In flight, I was usually allowed to keep my baby in the sling, but some flight attendants asked me to remove the sling during take-off and landing. Even if my baby was asleep, removing the sling was easy and I could keep my baby close to me, where he was most comfortable. This eliminated the need for a stroller, which was one less thing to gate-check at boarding time and one less item to keep track of any time we had flight delays, gate changes, or other inconveniences.

If you're traveling by car, the most important thing to keep in mind is that you'll probably need to stop a lot more frequently en route with children than you did pre-baby. We always plan for "time and a half" when we're considering how long a road trip might take us; so if without children, a drive took us around six hours, we planned for nine hours of road time with children. Rest stops generally take longer, too ... planning for diaper

changes, nursing, solid feedings when the kids were old enough to need them, and some time to walk around and stretch added time, but were all necessary. Of course, this usually meant an additional night in a hotel along the way, since we, as drivers, were safer when we were rested.

The first time we traveled with a baby, we were shocked by how much stuff we thought we needed! As it turned out, we didn't actually need much: a small, portable booster seat that attaches to a chair (much cleaner and more comfortable for baby than restaurant high chairs, also suitable at homes we visited), diapers (we usually resorted to disposables when we were traveling, even though we used cloth at home), a few bibs, clothes, a sling, a sippy cup (after six months) and a few toys got us through our trips. I was thankful to not end up like a family I knew, who packed a car-top carrier to its capacity with a high chair, exersaucer, stroller, bath tub insert, and portable crib—only to have the carrier open and throw all of its contents out onto the interstate! Breastfeeding, **cosleeping** (<https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/safe-sleep-breastfeeding-babies/>), and **babywearing** (<https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/baby-wearing/>) all contributed to the supreme portability of my babies, and, to them, “home” was simply where I was ... wherever we were!

## HOTELS

When choosing a hotel on your trip, plan ahead. If there are hotel chains you have stayed at before and you know the standard of cleanliness and convenience they offer, search online for those along your route and make advance reservations. Often, you will save money by booking ahead and you'll definitely prevent extra stress at the end of a long travel day if you don't have to ask at lots of places whether there is vacancy and whether the room is suitable for your family (for example with regard to bed configuration, non-smoking and location).

In most hotels, you have a choice of bed configuration, which means you can think about what will work best for your family for the nights you'll be away from home. A word of caution: cribs at hotels are often dirty or damaged, and may be unsafe for your baby. Also, if he is not accustomed to sleeping in a crib, he's not going to want to be in one when you're in a strange place, for sure! Many families ease their worries about the baby

falling out of the bed by either letting the baby sleep between the parents, or by putting extra pillows on the floor on the side of the bed baby is sleeping on. Of course, baby typically tries to sleep closer to mother, not usually away, so falls are not common, at home or at hotels. In families with more than one child, sometimes two smaller beds work best—mom shares a bed with the youngest nursling and dad sleeps beside the older child.

When you first check in, be on the lookout for safety concerns, especially if your child is mobile. Lock windows and balcony doors, and let your child know those areas are off-limits. Move phone book, Bible or hotel books, and pens out of your child's reach so you don't have damages to pay for when you check out. Move TV remote and toilet paper to a high location, and, if necessary, unplug the phone so your child doesn't mistakenly call anyone. Closely inspect the floor ... even in a relatively clean hotel, you might find food particles, dead bugs, and other undesirable items, especially behind and under furniture. If your baby is especially curious, you might feel better bringing your own electrical outlet covers—just don't forget to retrieve them before you check out. At bath time, a folded up towel works well as a cushion for washing your baby in the bathtub; for older children, the plastic cups provided in most hotel rooms make terrific bath toys and preclude the need for you to pack those.

If you are pumping or need to store your milk, let the hotel know in advance that you have a medical necessity for a refrigerator. Most hotels do not charge for this service if you specify a medical need. In a pinch, however, you can put your containers of milk in the ice bucket, filled with ice, or if you're traveling with a cooler, you can stock it well with ice from the hotel while you're there and before you leave. If you're traveling with your baby for leisure, you probably won't need to pump or store milk, but if you're traveling for work and will be separated from your baby at your destination, these are good tips to keep in mind.

When choosing a hotel, noticing which ones offer “kids stay free” or “kids eat free” deals might draw you to the more family-friendly locations; as well, they may attract many families, not all of whom are respectful of quiet hours. As afraid as many new parents are that their baby will be awake and crying all night, disturbing the guests on the other side of the wall, it is

more likely that other families and their children are racing and shouting through the hallways just as you've finally gotten your little one to sleep! Remember to encourage your own children to be respectful and quiet when you're walking through corridors at all times of the day, but especially between the hours of 9 pm and 9 am, which are commonly accepted as quiet hours.

A hotel with a pool offers a great diversion for a traveling family, and the activity of swimming can really drain a child's energy (thereby making him more apt to sleep well). It can even be worth stopping your drive an hour or two earlier than you otherwise might have, so that you can partake of the amusement offered by the pool—especially in the winter or if your destination is going to be “boring” in the eyes of a child.

### HAVE FUN!

Try not to change things, like diet or sleep, on your trip. Keep your child on the foods he is used to; if your baby is an infant, avoid starting new solid foods while you're away from home. A child who feels bad won't adapt or behave as well as he would under his normal circumstances, and food additives and colors can cause behavioral issues. It's better to tell grandma, “No, thank you” and risk hurting her feelings than to feed your child something he is not ready for or isn't used to and risk his discomfort. At the same time, try to go with the flow.

If your child misses a naptime or goes to bed a little later than usual, as long as your child is happy, don't worry about routines. You'll settle back into them once you return home. If your destination features family your child doesn't know well, keep in mind that, even if they're extremely familiar to you, they are strangers to your child and his apprehension should be respected as he gets to know grandma, uncle, or cousin. Reminding your family members of this before you travel can pre-empt hurt feelings and ensure a happy experience for your child.

No matter the purpose of your trip, plan at least one special part of it with your child in mind. A walk through a new town, a subway ride, or a view from a scenic viewpoint can all be thrilling for a child. Be sure to give your older children opportunities for responsibility, independence, and

helpfulness, and praise them when they exhibit these. A positive, cheerful attitude from you, even if you're feeling overwhelmed by the trip, will go a long way toward keeping our children cooperative and at ease. With some advance planning, your child-centered habits will carry you along your journey with ease. Don't forget to take pictures!

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