

8 Tips to Stay Healthy When You Fly

You're running late for your 6:30 a.m. flight. As you frantically grab your bags and race towards the car, cursing yourself for booking such an early flight, you realize that the travel mug of dark roast coffee won't hold off your hunger pangs during a three-hour flight. Sadly, preparing a healthy breakfast at home isn't among your top priorities this morning.

Airports understand your time limitations and lack of planning. They respond with hot [cinnamon buns](#), [frappuccinos](#), greasy [breakfast sandwiches](#), and all kinds of convenient pre-packaged foods that ultimately crash your blood sugar. So, as you're boarding your plane, you realize you're tired, cranky, hungry, yet oddly craving yet another low-fat muffin exactly the same as the one you devoured 45 minutes ago near the gate.



I travel quite a bit for work. Whether I'm heading on a book tour or speaking at a medical conference, airports have become my second home. Even in the worst situation, I've learned to make smart choices rather than succumb to sugary temptations, stress, sleep deprivation, and other inconveniences travel imposes.

I can't make your plane arrive on time or the flight attendant accommodate your request, but these seven strategies can make your flying experience healthier, less frustrating, and - dare I say it - even enjoyable.

1. Prep Healthy Travel Essentials

Don't leave anything to chance, including meals and snacks. Dr. Robert Atkins called flying "The Final Frontier of Junk Food," and airports fit that description too. Arrive armed with raw nuts, fruit, protein powder (I'm partial to the non-soy, plant-based kind), and other portable snacks. You'll save time, money, and potential temptation for that salty pretzel or that nuts-and-candy trail mix from the terminal kiosk.

2. Maintain Optimal Blood Sugar Levels

Eating the right food combo provides your ticket to steady blood sugar, reducing hunger and cravings and maximizing fat-burning hormones. Make sure every meal you eat contains lean protein, healthy fats, leafy and cruciferous green veggies, and [slow-release high-fiber carbs](#) to keep you full and focused during your flight while everyone else is salivating over those stale muffins.

3. Don't Blow Off Exercise

A few days without exercise won't hurt, right? Wrong. Among its benefits, a good workout can improve mood, reduce anxiety, and boost feel-good endorphins. You might get funny looks, but [squats](#), [lunges](#), and other body-weight exercises make excellent pre-boarding activities. Airport stairs make the perfect place for burst training. Simply run up a flight of stairs as fast as you can, walk back down at normal pace, and repeat. Think outside the box, and make your gym wherever you are. TIP: To make this happen, wearing sneakers or other comfortable shoes is essential.

4. Stay Hydrated

Most airline passengers head straight to the coffee shop for an energizing java pick-me-up. But caffeine plus flying equals a double-dehydration whammy, and by time you realize you're thirsty, you're already [dehydrated](#). Also, as relaxing as it can be, avoid the temptation to have a glass of pinot noir as you're waiting for your flight. Alcohol might assuage your nerves, but it also dehydrates you. Likewise, skip java or tea on your flight in favor of pure filtered water.

5. Get 7-9 Hours of Sleep

Sleep is crucial for optimizing your hormone levels, including feel-good serotonin. Erratic schedules, different time zones and jet lag can seriously impede sleep. Just like with food, you need to prepare for sleep. Travel with earplugs and an eye mask to cancel out noise and light. If possible, arrive at your destination a day before your scheduled meetings so you get an optimal night's sleep. Melatonin and herbal sleep aids can also help improve sleep.

6. Don't Stress

I know: easier said than done! Whether you're dealing with overly demanding security checks or your plane is circling the tarmac for an hour, flying creates anxiety and frustration that elevates your stress hormone cortisol. Among its duties, cortisol breaks down muscle and stores fat. Breathe deeply, put your delay (or whatever frustration arises) into perspective, and acknowledge that certain things are beyond your control.

7. Nourish Optimally

My must-have travel supplements include a high-quality multivitamin. I also come armed with vitamin D, which boosts immunity to ward off whatever nasty bug is circulating in the cabin of the plane. Magnesium does double duty to relax nerves during in-flight turbulence and relieve constipation. I also travel with a green-drink powder, since finding fresh vegetables in an airport is about as likely as your flight being on time.

8. Keep Germs at Bay

I'm going to say this at the risk of sounding a little paranoid: Carry hand-sanitizer with you, and use it after you touch any surface at the airport or inside the plane. Aside from the obvious places such as bathrooms, other [risky surfaces](#) include airplane trays and latches on overhead bins - influenza, diarrhea and MRSA viruses have been found on them.

Have a safe flight and stay healthy!