

GUT HEALTH ON THE GO

Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC

Summertime is here and travel season is in full swing! Whether you're headed to the beach, exploring a new city, or camping under the stars there are many things to look forward to!

But there's one part of travel that many of us don't look forward to - and that we rarely talk about: what it can do to your gut.

Travel is exciting, but it can also be stressful, wreaking havoc on your digestion and gut. Whether it's the "runs" after eating unfamiliar foods, the extremely common problem of constipation, or motion sickness with long car rides, your digestive system might not love the journey quite as much as you do.

Fortunately, a few simple, evidence-based strategies can help keep things running smoothly.

Constipation

Travel constipation is very common. Often, we are hesitant to drink too much water to avoid having to find a bathroom. That, along with changes to diet and routine can result in sluggish digestion.

- **Stay hydrated**
Dehydration is one of the biggest culprits. Keep a water bottle with you and sip regularly throughout the day. Limit alcohol, which can further dehydrate you.
- **Eat plenty of fiber**
Aim to include a wide variety of plant foods, including lots of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Travel often involves lots of fried foods and heavier restaurant meals, so bringing along your own fiber can be helpful. Dried fruit, (such as prunes and apricots), chia seeds to stir into water, and travel packets of psyllium (Metamucil) are all convenient options.
- **Pack a back-up plan**
Consider bringing along some Miralax if the fiber doesn't do the trick. It's generally considered to be a safe, non-stimulant over-the-counter remedy (as always, check with your doctor).
- **Listen to your body**
Even though it might be inconvenient, make sure you go when you have the urge - ignoring the urge can contribute to constipation as well.

Nausea & Motion Sickness

Motion sickness is caused by a sensory mismatch of signals to the brain when you're in a moving car, plane, or boat. The most effective thing for long-term relief is repeated, habitual exposure, but that won't help much on today's sight-seeing boat trip! Medications like Dramamine, while potentially effective, can cause drowsiness.

Non-drug tips:

(These often work even better if you combine several together.)

- Face forward and sit in the most stable part of the vehicle. Watch the horizon.
- Lie down and close your eyes if possible.
- Stabilize head movements, try leaning back against the headrest.
- Get fresh air whenever possible.
- Practice deep breathing or relaxation techniques. Nausea often worsens with anxiety.
- Use distractions such as listening to pleasant music, audiobooks, or a podcast.
- Try acupressure on the P6 point (center of the wrist, 3 fingers from the crease of the wrist). Sea-Bands are a popular brand that many people swear by, although studies are mixed regarding effectiveness.



- Bring ginger. Ginger is one of the best-researched natural remedies for nausea and motion sickness, and in clinical trials, it has been shown to be extremely effective at reducing symptoms. Use ginger tea, ginger capsules, fresh, or even candied ginger. (When my kids were little, we never traveled without a bag of candied ginger!)

Diarrhea

Traveling comes with the risk of traveler's diarrhea, which can quickly ruin a vacation that you've been planning for weeks or months! Even in well-developed countries, changes in routine, stress, and diet can cause the "runs."

Here are some tips to protect yourself and manage symptoms if needed. (As always, discuss with your healthcare practitioner, especially if you are uncertain about the area you are traveling to).

Before and during travel:

- Take some **probiotics**. Some strains that are highly recommended for preventing and treating traveler's diarrhea: *Saccharomyces Boulardii* and *Lactobacillus GG*.
- Take some **Travelan**. If going to high-risk areas, this non-drug over-the-counter supplement (originally co-developed by the Department of Defense) uses bovine colostrum to prevent diarrhea before it happens.

While traveling:

- Avoid overeating and greasy meals.
- Practice food safety. In high-risk areas, avoid fresh fruits and vegetables unless you peel them yourself, and avoid tap water and ice.
- Well-cooked, steaming hot foods and commercially bottled beverages are considered safe.
- Avoid undercooked meats, especially from street vendors.
- Carry hand sanitizer and use it often, especially before eating.

If it happens:

- Stay hydrated with frequent sips of fluids.
- Rice and bananas (especially green bananas) can settle the stomach.
- Skip a meal or two to let your gut rest.
- Try some Pepto-Bismol (if not taken for prevention.)
- If taking over-the-counter anti-diarrheal medications, it is important to follow the directions on the package carefully. They should not be over-used.
- Seek medical attention for severe or persistent symptoms.

With a little preparation, you can help your gut stay happy on the go. Here's to a healthy, enjoyable summer of travel!

How will you keep your gut healthy and happy on the go?



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