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**LONG-TERM DAMAGE TO YOUR EARS**

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**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** 'On descent, when the pressure changes fastest, you can suffer barotraumas - damage to the tissue inside various cavities in your head, such as sinuses and middle ear,' says Dr

Rohit Pratap, ear, nose and throat consultant from Spire Bushey Hospital. 'With infections or allergies present you can develop a perforated eardrum.'

**FLIGHT FIXER:** A new earplug device, Earplanes (£5.10, boots.com), claims to regulate the pressure in your ear. For those who suffer chronic sinusitis after flying, there is a new surgical procedure called a 'balloon sinuplasty'.



**Watch out for the long-haul health horrors!**

**LONG-HAUL** flights can carry you to locations our grandparents could only dream about, and every year more than 300 million people board one.

But the cramped conditions can lead to an array of health problems, from infections and bad backs to life-threatening

By Patrick Strudwick

blood clots. So what are the hazards of this form of travel? We have unearthed some of the truths the airlines may not want you to know and offer some tried and tested ways to avoid the risks.

**BADLY BATTERED BACKS**

**THE PROBLEM:** Sitting down puts almost twice as much pressure on your back as standing. Add to this hours spent slumped over, with little legroom, and you have a perfect storm for back complaints.

**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** 'You'd be less likely to develop back problems if you stood for the entire journey,' says Dr Rajy Bajaj, consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Barnet General Hospital. 'And the neck is vulnerable to osteoarthritis.'

**FLIGHT FIXER:** Walk around and stretch, says Dr Bajaj, and use a lumbar pillow. Try M&S Travel Essentials Luxury Neck Pillow (£2, markandspencer.com). Consuming fluids and bananas prevents clamps. Do buttock and shoulder and foot circles before sleep, says chiropractor Tim Hutchful.

**THE VERY COMMON COLD**

**THE PROBLEM:** You are at least five times more likely to catch a cold on a flight than on the ground, a study in the Journal Of Environmental Health Research found. That risk can be as much as 115 times greater the longer you are in the air.

**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** The study concludes the high cold-transmission rates on flights are due to reduced resistance to infection from the usual very dry cabin air and fatigue, coupled to the small cabin air space per person, and low

outside air-replacement rates of newer aircraft. Environmental hygiene specialist Dr Lisa Ackerley says: 'Your mucous membranes dry up, reducing your natural defences to cold and flu viruses.'

**FLIGHT FIXER:** Wash your hands, use anti-bacterial wipes and avoid contact with handles and trays. Try Boots Pharmaceutical Anti Viral Hand Foam (£3.99, boots.com).

**ALLERGIC SHOCK**

**THE PROBLEM:** Severe food allergies, in particular to peanuts, can prove dangerous on long flights. Those particularly sensitive don't even need to eat a nut to go into anaphylaxis - a severe reaction causing swelling of the throat, rashes and low blood pressure.

**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** 'Just being in close proximity to nuts can cause anaphylactic shock,' says Dr Lisa Ackerley. 'Peanuts have very sticky proteins that attach readily to aircraft seats, so it can simply be breathing in dust containing traces of nuts that sparks allergic reactions. And unless the passenger is carrying an EpiPen, which administers an adrenaline shot, and that shot is given quickly, they can die.'

**FLIGHT FIXER:** Always inform the airline of your allergy so you are not served food with any trace of nuts, and carry an EpiPen. Dr Ackerley recommends washing your hands thoroughly and frequently, to protect against peanut particles.



**BED BUG PARADISE**

**THE PROBLEM:** Bed bugs are parasitic insects that feed on human blood and jump not only on to the guest but also into their hand luggage - which then sits in overhead carriers on board. In 2011, traveller Zane Salkin reported that bugs had infested her seat and headrest on a flight from LA to Heathrow. BA confirmed bugs had been found and fumigated the plane.

**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** 'Bed bugs are very good travellers, love warm places and can get into a plane's furnishings,' says Dr Ackerley. 'And it can be a bigger problem in First or Business Class because there's bedding such as blankets and pillows, meaning more places to infest.' Bites symptoms include a rash, allergic reactions and even psychological problems such as depression, as an infestation can cause social isolation.

**FLIGHT FIXER:** To avoid getting bed bugs in your luggage, Dr Ackerley recommends using the suitcase stands in hotels rather than putting luggage on the bed. Once on board, keep your luggage away from other passengers.



**BLOOD CLOTS IN THE LEGS**

**THE PROBLEM:** Deep-vein thrombosis is the best-known health hazard of flying. A blood clot forms in the deep veins in your leg and travels up into the lungs. It is claimed it kills up to 1,000 UK travellers a year.

**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** 'Long-haul flights increase your chance of DVT due to the combination of sitting still for long periods and being in cramped positions,' says Dr Celia Kynskides, consultant vascular surgeon at The Private Clinic in London. Added to that, dehydration thickens blood.

**FLIGHT FIXER:** Flight

socks help squeeze the blood through the legs properly, but moving around is crucial. Dr Kynskides says: 'Walk around every hour, if you suspect a clot, then keep hydrated, ask if a doctor's on board and seek treatment.' Controversy rages about the efficacy of aspirin in preventing DVT, but Dr Kynskides warns: 'Evidence points to aspirin only lowering DVT risk in people who have already had it. Try VR Flight Socks (£14.99, vitalactive.com).

**FLYING INTO A BIG PANIC**

**THE PROBLEM:** Studies into long-haul transportation of animals found that stress could account for 40 per cent of deaths on arrival, and that the longer the journey, the greater the risk. It shows the stress of long-haul travel.

**WHY IT'S A WORRY:** 'The longer duration gives passengers time to over-think and that can start a spiral of psychological and physiological reactions,' says psychotherapist Dr Emma Mardin. 'Anxious thoughts trigger adrenaline, which increases the stress hormone cortisol and that raises blood pressure and blood sugar - sparking palpitations and hyperventilation. If extreme turbulence occurs, some passengers can suffer post-traumatic stress.'

**FLIGHT FIXER:** Mental health professionals can help tackle aerophobia and prescription sedatives can prove useful. For non-prescription tablets, Nature's Aid Ucalm contains St. John's Wort to calm anxiety and improve mood (£8.95, natureaid.co.uk).

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Legroom is measured as the distance between the back of one seat and the back of another. Most economy long-haul offers legroom of about 32in. The length of the average adult femur - the thighbone connecting the knees to the hips - is 18in. And once the width of the back of the seat is factored in, which can be 8in, that leaves someone of average height with just 6in of legroom. For someone who is 6ft 2in, that can mean no legroom at all.