



Healthy Travel

a pocket guide for seniors

Claire Westmacott, MPH

International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers

South African Society of Travel Medicine





Healthy Travel: a pocket guide for seniors

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The travel health recommendations contained in this Guide are intended as guidelines only. The health information provided is meant to complement, not substitute, the advice of your healthcare practitioner. To ensure that all your travel health needs are covered, seek further assistance from your healthcare practitioner or travel health clinic.

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HOW ARE YOU
FEELING?

TODAY I'M 50% ACHE'S
AND 50% PAINS



CHAPTER 14:

Aches and pains

Aches and pains can develop at any time and in the excitement of exploring new places, pre-existing musculoskeletal conditions can worsen and injuries occur. As we age, musculoskeletal conditions become more common and the likelihood of falls and injuries increases. However, proactively managing an existing condition and minimising the risk of injury while travelling can help you have a relatively, if not completely, pain-free trip.

How musculoskeletal conditions can affect you

During travel you may experience stiffness, aching and joint pain from long periods of sitting or immobility. However, if you have a pre-existing musculoskeletal condition such as **backache**, **osteoarthritis** (joint disease) or **inflammatory arthritis**, travel can worsen the stiffness and pain.

As older travellers, we are at higher risk of falls and fractures, which can have serious health consequences and affect future travel. The likelihood of falling increases if you have poor vision or depth perception, if you are dizzy or disoriented, or if you are navigating cramped, poorly lit spaces, uneven steps and unpaved roads.

You are also at increased risk of falling if you have decreased mobility and poor coordination due to loss of muscle strength. Travellers who have **osteoporosis** (decreased bone mass) and reduced muscle strength have a higher risk of sustaining a fracture following a fall.

Helpful tips

BEFORE YOU GO

- Ask your healthcare practitioner if your planned trip activities are suitable for you.
- Prepare by improving your physical fitness and endurance before departure.
- Take time to plan the details of your trip. Research how walkable your destination is and learn about the climate.

- High altitudes and extreme temperatures (hot or cold) can affect joint pain and other medical conditions. **See Chapter 8: Environmental conditions on page 70 for more information.**
- Bring appropriate footwear (supportive and well-worn shoes) for the activities you are planning. **Note:** New shoes can cause pain and blisters.
- Pack any aids or supplies in your carry-on luggage such as heating and cooling pads, cervical (neck) collars and extra cushions for back support.
- Consider travelling with a companion who can assist you.
- Book accommodation with an elevator. If this is not possible, ask for a room on the ground or first floor.
- If you have a prosthetic joint or medical device, ask your healthcare practitioner for a letter detailing the device information and insertion date. This will facilitate security screenings and medical assistance abroad if needed.

▶ PLANNING YOUR TRANSPORTATION

- Book an aisle seat or request a seat with extra legroom so that you can easily stretch and move about during transit. Sitting for a long period of time can cause joint stiffness and deep vein thromboembolism (blood clots). **See Chapter 15: Blood clots (venous thromboembolism) on page 120 for more information.**