



HOW TO... Prevent Traveller's Diarrhea



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Don't get stuck inside during your trip. Unsafe food and water are the main causes of traveller's diarrhea, one of the most common travel related illnesses.

Food and Water Basics

There are three reasons why you should use your best judgment during your trip when it comes to food and water safety.

1. Like the rest of our body, our gastrointestinal system needs time to adjust to a new environment. Diverse ways of preparing, cooking, and serving foods, as well as different water quality impact the delicate balance of your gut. If you're going for a short trip, your body will not be able to adjust quickly enough so taking precautions will reduce your chances of getting ill.

2. It's not necessarily what you eat, but where. In many travel situations, we don't get to cook our own food. Not knowing where it came from, how it was processed, and if the handler(s) followed proper hygiene increases the risk of food poisoning from common bacteria like *e.coli*, *salmonella*, and *campylobacter*, viruses, parasites, or toxins.
3. It's easy to forget to drink enough liquids during a trip. Since travel puts you at greater risk of dehydration, make sure to stay well hydrated with treated water, tea, coffee, or carbonated drinks.

A Helpful Reminder...

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before eating and drinking.
- *Boil it, cook it, peel it, or leave it!* Eat only well cooked foods served hot, including baked goods, and peel your own raw fruits and vegetables. Eat smaller sized fish since pollutants are less likely to bio-accumulate.
- Avoid raw shellfish and fish, raw salads, eggs, and unpasteurized dairy products, including ice cream.
- Don't eat buffet foods that have not been continuously refrigerated, put on ice, covered, or have been out for a long period of time.
- If the restaurant or street vendor stall looks dirty assume poor hygienic practices.
- Drink water that has been treated or boiled, or comes in a sealed and non-tampered bottle. In areas with poor sanitation you'll want to use chlorine or iodine tablets.

Carbonated drinks and beer in sealed bottles or cans are usually safe.

- Don't use ice unless you know it comes from treated or purified water.
- Brush your teeth with treated or purified water only.

If You Get Sick...

- Make sure to stay hydrated. Drink lots of purified water and warm fluids like herbal teas and soups. Avoid diuretic liquids like coffee and alcohol which increase water loss.
- If you have diarrhea, use oral rehydration salts (available from your health practitioner or travel health clinic) to re-balance your electrolytes. If you don't have any, mix 6 teaspoons of sugar with 1 teaspoon of salt in one litre / 0.26 gallon of purified water. Do not take remedies that reduce bowel movements. You want to get rid of unwanted germs that are making you sick.
- Take general pain relief medication if needed.
- Make sure to rest and get lots of sleep.
- Seek medical attention if you have a fever or symptoms that persist more than 2-3 days.

Adapted from IAMAT's 'How To Be A Travel Hygiene Champion' pamphlet. Reviewed and updated: January 2013.

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