

ASK AHSC

ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

from The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

Q How can I enjoy the holidays and stick to my modified diet? *V.G., Tucson*

A It is difficult to answer that question specifically, since there are many different diet modifications, but the following hints may be useful in surviving the holiday food frenzy.

Attitude plays a big role in successfully managing the endless variety and quantity of holiday treats. Be prepared.

If you need to limit calories, sodium, protein or other specific nutrients, be sure you know which foods and beverages are high in that nutrient. Use food labels, food analysis books or the Internet as sources of information. A registered dietician is the nutrition expert to turn to for additional information.

Have a plan that sets realistic goals for what and how much you'll eat. Know what your temptations are, *plan* to have a small portion, then move away from the temptation.

At holiday social events, find a comfortable area away from the buffet tables. It's too easy to reach for "just one more" when it's an arm's length away! If a co-worker always has goodies out, avoid passing that desk as much as possible.

Don't forget that alcohol counts too. It's a high-calorie, low-nutrient food that's around

more now. Some medications require complete avoidance of alcohol, so find out if any of your medications do. Limit alcoholic beverages to about one per hour so your liver can break down the alcohol. Alternate an alcoholic beverage with a non-alcoholic beverage. For your safety, and the safety of loved ones everywhere, have a designated driver.



Continue an exercise/activity program. If you don't have one, start one as a gift to yourself. The gift of health is the best gift of all. Check with your physician if you haven't exercised in a while. Plan an extra walk to help burn extra calories.

Remember that holidays are more than food – renew old friendships, make new friendships, visit with family. Use your mouth for conversation, not consumption!

Enjoy the special holiday foods, but keep in mind that *you* pay the price when you overindulge.

—Deborah Pesicka, R.D.,
registered dietician, University
Medical Center

Q What can I do to prevent health problems while traveling during the holidays? *N.G., Tucson*

A Holiday travel is exciting and fun, but there can be risks. Appropriate preparations before travel and suitable precautions during travel can reduce many of these risks.

The greatest health risk for travelers is not due to infections but to *trauma*, especially motor vehicle accidents. When driving, be sure to wear seat belts. When flying, keep your seat belt on to avoid injury in the event of sudden turbulence. (If you're going to be driving after a flight, keep in mind that one alcoholic drink consumed in-flight has the same impact as two to three drinks on the ground.)

Serious illness during travel is most commonly due to *pre-existing conditions* such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes or asthma. The medicines you normally take may not be readily available during your travel, so bring plenty for the entire trip.

Motion sickness (nausea or vomiting) may occur when traveling by car, plane or boat.

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Over-the-counter medications, including diphenhydramine (e.g., Benadryl) are available to prevent this. Be sure to follow package directions--once motion sickness has begun, the medications may not be effective.

Altitude sickness is common at altitudes greater than 14,000 feet and may occur at altitudes greater than 8,000 feet. Symptoms include headache, poor appetite, sleep disturbance and just not feeling well. Shortness of breath is an ominous sign. Mild symptoms generally resolve spontaneously in a few days. More severe illness should be treated by descent to a lower altitude.

Jet lag (fatigue lasting several days, disorientation, irritability and disturbed sleep patterns) occurs when people travel through several time zones and tends to be more severe when traveling from east to west. Generally, you need one day for each time zone crossed to adjust

to the new time zone. If you begin your trip overtired, stressed or hungover, it will take longer to adjust.

Melatonin appears to be somewhat effective in treating jet lag, however I don't recommend it because the amount of melatonin in different preparations is not standardized, making it impossible to know whether the preparation you buy will be effective or not.

Sun protection is essential when traveling to southern U.S. destinations, tropical regions or higher elevations. Be sure to bring sunscreen, sunglasses and wide-brimmed hats.

Other helpful items to pack include pain medicine (such as aspirin, acetaminophen and ibuprofen), an antihistamine (which also is useful for prevention of motion sickness), skin moisturizer, band-aids and an antiseptic (e.g., Betadine).

In general, no specific travel-related precautions for protection

from infectious diseases are necessary for travel in the United States, Canada and Western Europe.

In developing and semi-developed regions, there is increased risk for acquiring certain infectious diseases, depending on the specific country and setting within that country. The most common infection is traveler's diarrhea, which may affect 20 to 50 percent of travelers to many of these regions. The risk for acquiring hepatitis A also is increased in countries in this category.

If you're going to be traveling to areas where you will be at risk for contracting these or other infectious diseases, consult your physician about what preventive and treatment measures should be used.

—Rod Adam, M.D., director,
Traveler's Clinic, Department of Medicine, The University of Arizona College of Medicine,

