

Before I travel, I always read up on weather conditions, latest aviation news, information about my destination, and what I'd rather NOT read about: recently-reported infections, diseases and other ailments spread among senior travelers.

No matter what the bad news is, I immediately start showing symptoms of it. A flu epidemic. I'm sure to catch it. Bad water? I'm sure to drink it. Food poisoning? That burrito did taste a bit off.

For fellow seniors who fear catching illnesses while crammed into trains, planes, buses, taxis and vans during travels, here are some hints on fighting back:

1. Your mature digestive system just isn't what it used to be. Stay away from potentially harmful foods and water. The delicacies on the street vendor's cart may look enticing, but a salad back at the hotel is safer. That water tap in the town square may look refreshing, but stick to commercially bottled water.
2. Don't believe the myth that the same polluted air in planes is constantly recirculated, and everything sent out by coughers and sneezers comes back again and again. The truth is that totally clean air is brought into the system from outside about every 90 seconds, and at least that is not one of your worries.
3. However, if those hacking sickos sit next to you during your travels, especially when you're trapped in an overseas flight while in the middle of a five-seat-across sardine can, there's not much you can do about it. If it is really bad, don't be shy and ask the flight attendant to find you another seat. If that's not possible, you can turn on one of those little overhead air vents and direct the flow on you. Not much help, but don't even think about opening the window.
4. To prevent infection as well as you can, be sure to take along on your trip such helpful items as mouth wash, medicated wipe pads for face, nose and hands, aspirin, first aid gear and other useful preventive items.
5. When waiting in the airport, train or bus station, Murphy's Law always seems to kick in. As soon as I'm seated in the waiting area, a woman with three colicky kids surround me, each with a disease of the month. In one such case, my very kind wife offered to hold one of the babies to help the mother, and you don't want to know what happened next. At least in an on-the-ground situation, you can flee to fresh air near a window or door.
6. My personal disease of the month always hits me on long travels these days. It's the good old-fashioned charley horse, leg cramps that cause sudden pain. While the agony is intense for the first few moments, it's usually a temporary condition and goes away in one to five minutes.

When I was a young athletic guy, I had frequent charley horses. If it happened at a desk or in a theater seat, I had to jump up and stomp around to work it out. That caused some embarrassment, especially when the onset made me scream out. I can remember some interrupted romantic moments ... but that's a whole 'nother story.

I still get them today, usually when crammed into an airline seat on long flights. If charley horses

happen to you frequently while traveling, ask your doctor for a prescription that contains quinine. In addition, drink lots of quinine water before your trip. Because my cramps usually strike in my left leg, I book seats where I can stretch that leg out or jump up into an aisle to work out the pain. Walking and stretching in the aisles at least once every 30 minutes on long flights may prevent the onset of such pains.

In general, do your best when traveling to stay away from the senior disease of the month by taking precautions to prevent or medications to ease any problems when they strike.