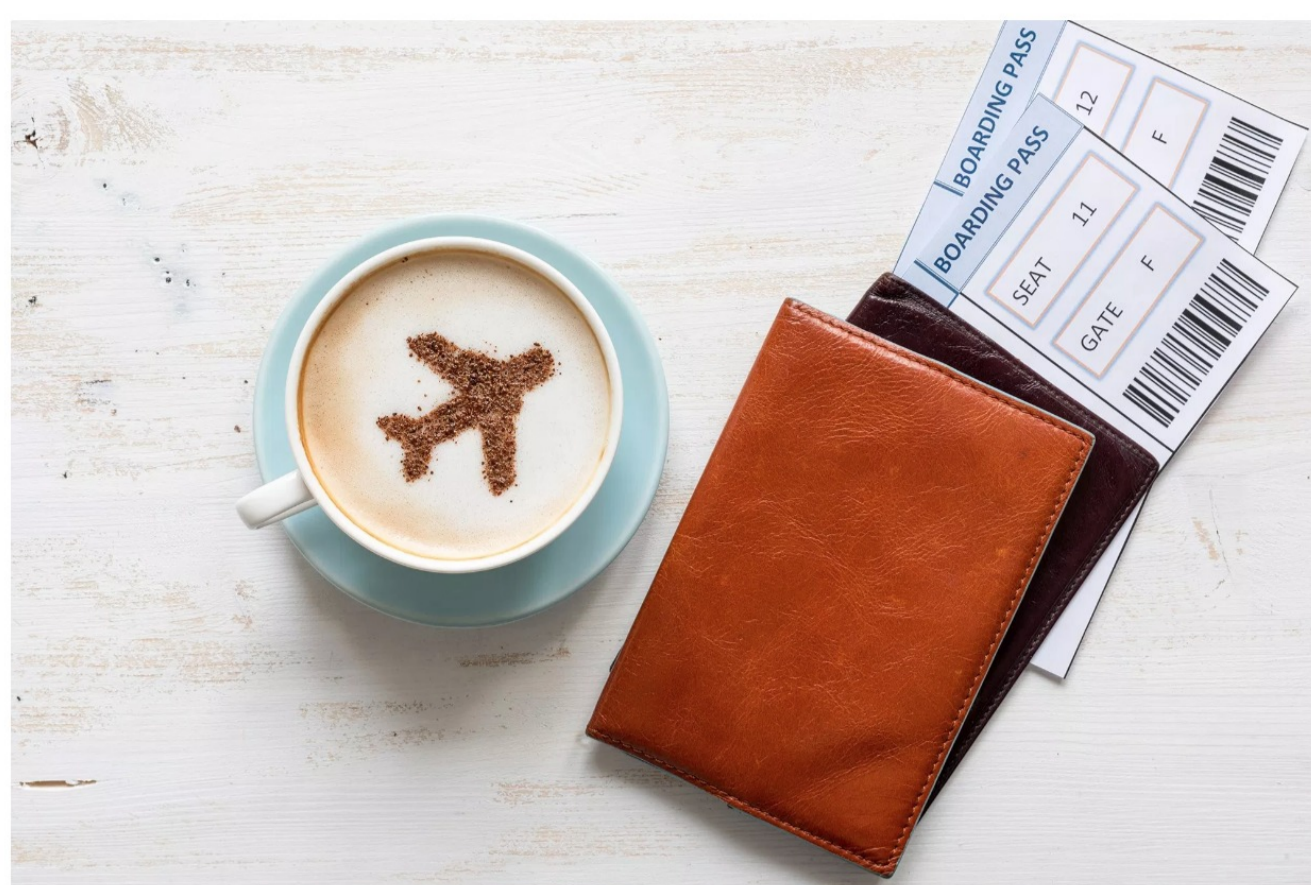


LIFE begins at... LIFE

Safe flying: how to travel well...long-haul



Australians love to travel – yet one of the realities of being based in the antipodes is that very often, this involves a long-haul flight. *Imogen A. Rose* sat down with leading health expert in travel medicine, *Dr Richard Dawood* to get all the up-in-air advice for travelling safely.

According to the World Health Organisation, “air travel, particularly over long distances, exposes passengers to a number of factors that may have an effect on health and well-being”. Whilst we may not be able to rearrange the atlas, there are a number of things we can do to improve the safety and happiness of one’s flight experience.

Dr Richard Dawood is a pioneering doctor and leading world health expert in Travel Medicine. His London Fleet Street Clinic is a go-to source for a broad spectrum of people ranging from everyday travellers to media personnel entering war-zones.

Here Dr Dawood shares his advice for a safer, happier flight.

Age and Health

It’s important to consider general health and age.

By age 50 and over, we are more likely to have a pre-existing medical condition. We may also have reduced mobility and reduced flexibility. Therefore, Dr Dawood states, “travel, particularly long-haul travel, requires more care”.

Accordingly, passengers are advised to consult their doctor or a travel medicine clinic well before the intended time of travel.

Aim to be as healthy as possible prior to travel. Indeed, a dream holiday might be just the incentive required to achieving a healthy weight, quitting smoking or addressing neglected medical issues.

Prepare wisely

Dr Dawood recommends focusing on what you need and minimising as much as possible.

Do include a medical kit containing both what you need, and *might*, need.

Read the Airline Rules and Regulations. It’s never any fun being interrogated, before having something as innocuous as toothpaste confiscated for exceeding quantity restrictions.

Book flight connections that allow a comfortable gap in order to avoid rushing or worse, panicking.

If possible, choose a higher class of travel. This will provide increased space and greater comfort.

Up, Up and Away

Dr Dawood maintains that once on board, the issue of most concern for passengers is cabin pressure, largely due to the reduced oxygen levels. The level remains adequate for healthy individuals, but may be of concern for smokers, or those passengers suffering from respiratory or other medical conditions. All airlines carry oxygen, which can be provided if required. However, if at risk, the issue should be raised with your GP well before departure.

Reducing your risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT):

1. Wear comfortable, non-restrictive clothing
2. Keep mobile – aim to stand, stretch and walk around the cabin at least once every hour
3. Avoid sitting in the same position for a prolonged period
4. Avoid deep sleep, don’t take sleeping pills (unless able to sleep in a fully flat position)
5. Keep hydrated
6. Consider wearing compression stockings during your flight (these should be correctly sized and fitted to the individual)

Visit Fleet Street Travel clinic to utilise their DVT risk calculator (www.fleetstreetclinic.com/dvt)

Hydration, Hydration, Hydration

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of hydration. Remaining safely hydrated requires a conscious effort. How well you deal with this challenge will directly affect how you feel during, and post, flight. Dr Dawood assures passengers that the formula is simple, 1 cup (250ml) of water per every hour of flight.

Alcohol and caffeine are best avoided, or taken moderately, since they exacerbate dehydration (you can make up for this to some extent by drinking extra water). Caffeine will also keep you awake.

Failure to maintain proper hydration increases susceptibility to a number of health related issues, ranging from discomfort, to bladder infections and the potentially fatal.

Take Charge and Relax

Dr Dawood reminds travellers that essentially, we are in control. Thus, “Enjoy, plan and allow plenty of time”!