

Six tips for traveling with heart disease

March 25 2016, by John P. Vavalle, Md

Traveling can come with many different challenges when it comes to eating healthy, getting enough rest, and physical exercise. But having heart disease should not limit your traveling abilities; in fact, it's good for your health! According to two long-term studies, traveling may lower your risk of a heart attack. Dr. John Paul Vavalle at UNC Center for Heart & Vascular provides advice on travel precautions and how to maintain your heart-healthy lifestyle while vacationing.

1. Take your required medications

Bring your required medication and make certain that you have enough for the entire length of your trip. If you are running low on your medicine, be sure to have your prescription refilled before you leave town. During your trip, take your medications at the same time intervals as you do at home. When you are traveling to a different time zone, adjust your medication schedule to the new time zone. Pack your medicine in a bag where it's easily accessible.

2. Make time to exercise

Physical activity is a key component to living a heart-healthy lifestyle. "Being immobile for a long time increases the risks for blood clot formation, a major risk factor for pulmonary issues and other complications," says Dr. Vavalle.

One way to reduce your risk of blood clots is by staying mobile. If you are on a long plane ride or long car ride, get up frequently and go for

short walks every 30 to 60 minutes to stretch your legs.

Also, make time to participate in your normal exercise activities. Don't skip your morning or evening walk, plan a route before you leave home so that you can stick to your exercise routine. Or if you can, book a hotel with fitness facilities that you can use during your stay.

3. Follow your usual heart-healthy diet

Continue your regular exercise regime and continue to follow a heart-healthy diet. Be sure to drink plenty of water during your flight to avoid dehydration as it can cause blood clots. Pay close attention to the salt content of food. Often times, prepared foods at restaurants have a much higher amount of sodium than what is normally used in home-cooked meals. "It's important to keep your diet and fitness a priority when you're traveling. That means making sure that you're making healthy choices when you're eating out," Dr. Vavalle says.

Look for other options for meal plans that don't involve sit-down restaurants or fast food. "If you're staying with a family or friend when traveling, you can use cooking at home as an opportunity to share your heart-healthy recipes and healthy lifestyle tips that you've learned."

4. Prepare ahead of your travel schedule and pack lightly

"Traveling can be fairly stressful, try to leave plenty of time to get to the airport extra early so you're not rushing through, dealing with crowds or having to run up or down the stairs."

Do your best to pack light suitcases. "Many of our heart patients aren't used to doing a lot of heavy physical activity on a day-to-day basis and

then all of the sudden they have three or four 50-pound suitcases they're trying to lug around."

5. Carry emergency numbers with you

Dr. Vavalle recommends that you travel with your doctor's numbers in case you have questions. If you anticipate that you may need to see a medical professional on your trip, do some research ahead of time to find a medical facility that's located close to your destination.

6. Listen to your body

"The thing I would advise against is when a patient postpones the chance to seek medical attention in fear of interrupting their vacation time." If something is bothering you, don't hesitate to call your doctor, or seek help locally. When traveling internationally, familiarize yourself with the [health](#) care system in the country you are heading to. Know how far you are from the local medical facilities. Buy travel insurance to be able to get medical evacuation back to the U.S., if going to remote places with rudimentary healthcare. Learn how to access the local EMS system.

Some symptoms of a [heart attack](#) may include: chest discomfort, discomfort or pain in other areas of the upper body, or shortness of breath, cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness. As soon as there are any signs or symptoms of a heart attack, call 911 immediately and get medical attention.

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

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