

Managing holiday travel stress

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Holiday travel might come with some extra baggage this year: traffic, delays and disruptions. While this is unavoidable, remaining calm will facilitate your chaotic travel days. A Baylor College of Medicine expert provides tips for coping with stress, anxiety and disturbances.

Know your triggers

People who experience anxiety have different triggers, so pinpoint those triggers ahead of time for a smoother [travel](#) day.

"Triggers might include the uncertainty of traffic, [flight delays](#), being in [public places](#) or seeing friends and family for the holidays," said Dr. Asim Shah, professor and executive vice chair in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor. "Based on your triggers, you can make a plan."

If traveling alone worries you, travel with a partner. Talk to your travel companion about your fears so they can help you alleviate stress. Use your stress management techniques, such as listening to soothing music, to mitigate anxiety.

Prepare for travel

Get a good night's rest the night before traveling, eat healthy and avoid drugs and alcohol since they cause instability and can exacerbate anxiety. Shah also suggests exercising before traveling. The endorphins from exercise will calm you down and help rid anxiety and nervous energy.

"Have a plan, distract yourself and reassure yourself that you are safe," he said.

Those who are traveling shorter distances can opt for driving instead of flying, especially for those who experience aerophobia. If you plan to travel by car, try not to drive during rush hour to limit anxiety about road rage and traffic.

Shah provides tips to prepare for delays:

- Try to take morning flights and think about a backup flight in the event of cancellations.
- Travel with airlines that will automatically book you for the next flight.
- If your schedule permits, book your travel to arrive a day early so you avoid the risk of arriving at the last minute.
- Purchase travel protection plans for expensive flights.
- Take direct flights when possible and sign up for flight alerts to prevent arriving to the airport with a major delay or cancellation.
- If you check a bag, have some clothes and important items in your handbag or tote if your luggage gets lost.
- Bring items that will allow you to pass the time: read a book, watch a movie, catch up on work or anything else that will entertain and distract you.

"Don't waste time—get to the airport early to prepare for long lines and parking issues," he said.

Poor behavior

Passenger disruptions have increased over the years. Some common reasons for the rise in [passenger](#) intolerance include:

- Flight delays and cancellations
- Jam-packed flights: this may cause some tension as people are nervous to be around others
- Substance (alcohol) abuse in the airport and on flights: passengers can get unruly when consuming substances in excessive quantities
- Decrease in tolerance: people's frustration is increasing and they may get worked up over small things

This combination of discontent and disruptions is directly related to the

amygdala limbic system in the brain, which reacts abnormally to any situation like this instead of responding peacefully. Rather than handling this physical and [psychological distress](#) in a calm manner, passengers may become rowdy and irritable.

"The [flight](#) crew should try to deescalate this type of situation with calmness, which is easier said than done. Being calm, polite and professional can help to reduce the chaos and build allies among other passengers," he said.

One disruptive passenger can cause [anxiety](#) and distress for the rest of the aircraft. If a passenger is being abusive, angry or offensive, a second passenger might intervene. According to Shah, passengers should not get involved as they have no authority and may escalate the situation. Stay calm and quiet and notify the air crew of the disruption. When the crew arrives to mitigate the chaos, come to their rescue if they need support.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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