

Prevention and Treatment of Motion Sickness

What is motion sickness?

Motion sickness is a group of unpleasant symptoms that can happen when someone is in a moving vehicle or on a boat or airplane. The first symptom is usually a feeling of fullness in the stomach. You might feel unwell, drowsy, or irritable. You may also have a headache, feel depressed or uninterested in what is going on, or want to be alone. These symptoms can progress to nausea, dizziness, and vomiting.

Where should I sit to prevent motion sickness?

You should choose the most stable portion of the vehicle and face forward. In a car or bus, this is usually in the front seat. On a boat, try to stand, sit, or lie down at the midpoint of the boat and along the centerline. In an airplane, try to sit over the wing.

Where should I look?

Looking outside the vehicle and at the distant horizon may prevent symptoms or help you feel better. Don't read, look at a computer screen, or look through a camera. If you can't see the horizon, it may be best to close your eyes and rest.

What else can I do?

Eat small amounts of soft, bland foods, such as canned peaches or crackers. Drink small amounts of fluids to stay hydrated. Do not drink alcohol or eat greasy, spicy, or acidic foods. Avoid things that have caused you nausea in the past.

Get plenty of rest before you travel, wear comfortable clothes, and do not get too wet, too hot, or too cold. Stay in a well-ventilated area, and avoid smells that cause nausea.

Are there medicines that can help?

Scopolamine is the most commonly recommended medicine for people who want to stay awake while they travel. Antihistamines (like Dramamine) also work, but may cause drowsiness. These medicines should be taken several hours before you travel. If you forget, take them as soon as you start to have symptoms.

Should I see my doctor about my motion sickness?

Talk to your doctor if your symptoms are so unpleasant that they affect your work or vacation plans, or if your symptoms do not stop within a few days.

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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