



EAR, NOSE, THROAT, AND SINUS CLINIC

AIRPLANE PROTOCOL

How to Unblock Your Ears?

Swallowing activates the muscle that opens the Eustachian tube. You swallow more often when you chew gum or let mints melt in your mouth. These are good air travel practices, especially just before take-off and during descent. Yawning is even better. Avoid sleeping during descent, because you may not be swallowing often enough to keep up with the pressure changes, (The flight attendant will be happy to awaken you just before descent).

If yawning and swallowing are not effective, unblock your ears as follows:

Step 1: Pinch your nostrils shut.

Step 2: Take a mouthful of air.

Step 3: Using your cheek and throat muscles, force the air into the back of your nose as if you were trying to blow your thumb and fingers off your nostrils.

When you hear a loud pop in your ears, you have succeeded. You may have to repeat this several times during descent.

Babies' Ears:

Babies cannot intentionally pop their ears, but popping may occur if they are sucking on a bottle or pacifier. Feed your baby during the flight, and do not allow him or her to sleep during descent.

Precautions:

- When inflating your ears, you should not use force. The proper technique involves only pressure created by your cheek and throat muscles.
- If you have a cold, a sinus infection, or an allergy attack, it is best to postpone an airplane trip.
- If you recently have undergone ear surgery, consult with our surgeon on how soon you may safely fly.

What About Decongestants and Nose Sprays?

Many experienced air travelers use a decongestant pill (like Pseudoephedrine) or nasal spray (like Afrin) an hour or so before descent. This will shrink the membranes and help the ears pop more easily. Travelers with allergy problems should take their medication at the beginning of the flight for the same reason.

Decongestant tablets and sprays can be purchased without a prescription. However, these should be avoided by people with heart disease, high blood pressure, irregular heart rhythms, thyroid disease, or excessive nervousness. Such people should consult their physicians before using these medicines. Pregnant women should likewise consult their physicians first.

If Your Ears Will Not Unblock:

Even after landing you can continue the pressure equalizing techniques, and you may find decongestants and nasal sprays to be helpful. (However, avoid making a habit of nasal sprays. After a few days, they may cause more congestion than they relieve). If your ears fail to open, or if pain persists, you will need to seek the help of a physician who has experience in the care of ear disorders. He/she may need to release the pressure or fluid with a small incision in the eardrum. Your doctor may also prescribe eardrops for pain and recommend Tylenol and/or Motrin to prevent pain if you have problems. Earplugs are also sold at most airports and drug stores to reduce pressure changes in the ear.

Motion Sickness:

What is the treatment?

Treatment for the nausea- Have your child lie down and keep a vomiting pan handy. Give him only sips of clear fluids until his stomach settles down. If your child goes to sleep, let him sleep. Usually, children won't vomit more than once, and all symptoms disappear in about 4 hours.

Prevention of motion sickness with antinausea medicine- The best treatment for motion sickness is prevention. Buy some nonprescription Dramamine at your drugstore. Dramamine comes in 50-mg tablets and a 15-mg/teaspoon liquid. The dosage is 1 teaspoon of liquid Dramamine for children 2 to 6 years old, 1 tablet for children 6 to 12 years old, and 2 tablets for children over 12 years. Give Dramamine 1 hour before traveling or going to an amusement park. The tablets give 6 hours of protection and are very helpful.

Prevention and types of travel:

Car trips: It will help if your child looks out the window. Do not look down at books or games in car. After age 12, children can sit in the front seat.

Sea travel: Avoid it when practical. Otherwise, stay on deck and look at the horizon.

Air travel: Select a seat near the wings.

Amusement parks: Avoid rides that spin.

Meals: Eat light meals before or during trip