

# All Aboard!

Contrary to popular belief, you can travel when pregnant.

WORDS ANGEL DREWGUS

**B**eing pregnant doesn't have to put an end to your travels. Plenty of women either choose or end up travelling even while they are pregnant, without any adverse effects on mother or foetus. However, there are some important considerations to make if you are planning to travel while pregnant.

Here are 6 steps to ensure safe travel during pregnancy.

## 1 Clearance from Obstetrician

Generally, travel is safe for patients with an uncomplicated pregnancy, assures Dr Cindy Pang, a consultant with the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Singapore General Hospital. It is however, important to check with your obstetrician before travelling. For air travel, most airlines require a "permission to travel" letter from your doctor. You may also wish to request for a copy of your scans and prenatal records to keep on hand in the event that you need medical attention in a foreign land, adds Dr Pang.

## 2 Best Time to Travel

"In general, it is safe to travel once the expectant mother is in her second trimester (week 14 to 27), when the risk of miscarriage and incidence of

common problems like morning sickness are lower, as is the common problems associated with the first trimester, like morning sickness," explains Dr Arthur Tseng, obstetrician and gynaecologist, Gleneagles Hospital.

Dr Pang agrees, "The second trimester is usually considered the best time to travel - morning sickness would usually have settled and the risk of miscarriage and preterm labour is at the lowest."

If you've had an uncomplicated pregnancy so far, then you can fly up to 36 weeks of pregnancy. However, most airlines are unwilling to carry women who are more than 32 weeks pregnant because of the risk of premature labour, adds Dr Tseng.

If travelling by sea, consider the possibility of aggravation to 'morning sickness'. Seasickness bands may be a good alternative to medications.

## 3 Airline Policy

There are restrictions on air travel during the third trimester with most airlines (generally between 34-36 weeks). Check your airline's policy about flying during pregnancy, advises Dr Pang. There can be variations by carrier and destination.

## 4 Safety during Travel

Fasten the lap belt under your bump whenever seated to protect against injury from unexpected



turbulence. Ensure that the strap is fastened under your abdomen and across the top of your thighs.

Check that your insurance policy covers pregnancy complications during travel, advises Dr Lim Min Yu, a consultant with NUH Women's Centre. Request an aisle seat, so that you can move about the cabin more easily. If your flight lasts more than 4 hours, you should wear properly fitted graduated elastic compression stockings.

Stay well hydrated, and try to avoid caffeine and alcohol. Aerated drinks can make you feel even more bloated as gas expands at higher altitudes where the air pressure is lower, explains Dr Lim.

## 5 Travel Time

Try to limit the travel time in a car, plane, bus or train to about 5-6 hours. According to Dr Pang, about 1 in a 1000 pregnant women has Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). This is a condition whereby clots form in the leg veins and these clots can sometimes migrate and lodge in the lungs, causing damage and even death. Prolonged immobilisation during a trip can increase the risk, so do take appropriate measures like keep hydrated, standing up or walking every half hour or so, and even consider compression stockings. Do note that if you develop a swollen painful calf or breathing difficulties shortly after a long journey, see a doctor urgently.

## 6 Avoid High Altitudes

Dr Pang advises against hiking in the mountains or staying in ski resorts as there is less oxygen in the air at higher altitudes. Long-term stays can affect the growth and development of the baby. You may be more prone to altitude sickness.



It may sound very boring, but avoid activities that put you at risk of falling. Instead try relaxing activities such as yoga, Pilates, massage treatment, swimming, brisk walking, or simply sit at a pavement cafe and watch the world go by. ■