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When To Avoid Flying: Advice on When Not to Travel



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FEBRUARY 17, 2019  *Guest Writers*  0

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Frankie Wallace is a freelance journalist with an interest in aviation news and politics. Wallace graduated from the University of Montana's Journalism School and currently resides in Boise, Idaho. The views expressed in this article are solely his.

Not sure if you're fit for a flight? Situations like recently having surgery or a heart attack are huge red flags that you shouldn't fly. Other medical issues aren't so obvious, though, yet they still pose a major health risk. Before you book that ticket or board the plane, it's imperative to know whether or not it's safe to fly and exactly what you're risking if you go through with your travel plans.

When You're Sick

Suspecting that you're coming down with something as your trip approaches is a terrible feeling. If you go on your trip, you could end up sick on the plane or during your time away; if you stay home, you'll lose out on the experience. This can also be a costly choice since airlines won't necessarily refund your ticket in a non-emergency situation.

Consider this, though: if you do get on the plane, not only will you put others at risk, particularly babies and elderly people, but



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you could end up feeling even more sick than you already do.

According to Orbitz, the change in cabin pressure along with dry air can be problematic for your immune system. You could end up with a variety of problems, including:

- Dehydration
- Headaches
- Ear pain
- Edema
- Nausea

If you already have a cold or fever, these additional ailments are only going to make you that much more miserable.

You don't have to cancel your trip if you have the sniffles or a mild headache, but the following situations are more serious and a good reason to avoid flying:

- A fever that's over 100 degrees Fahrenheit could be a sign of infection, which can get worse with travel and could be highly contagious. If you do manage to get your fever down to a normal temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, it's up to you to use your best judgement. Similarly, you shouldn't travel if you have an ear, nose, or sinus infection.

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- While some motion sickness or nausea may be normal and manageable for you, a stomach virus or food poisoning is very difficult to travel with. On top of the motion upsetting your stomach even more, getting sick when you're on a plane is uncomfortable and unpleasant, to say the least.

If You Have Chest Pain or Trouble Breathing

If you have chest pain, pressure, or squeezing, don't even think about getting on a plane – seek medical attention immediately. Chest pain could be a sign of heart trouble, which needs to be urgently checked out.

One possible scenario is that angina could lead to a heart attack. A common cause of angina is blocked arteries, resulting in chest pain if the heart doesn't get the right amount of blood flow. If a person is flying and experiences an increase in adrenaline, the body could require even more blood flow than normal. If the arteries are blocked, a heart attack could occur while you're in the air.

Anything that makes it difficult to breathe, including a cold, the flu, or a chronic

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respiratory disease, means you shouldn't get on a plane. It can be hard to take deep breaths when you have congestion. When you're flying, shortness of breath can be exacerbated.

After Surgery or a Medical Procedure

After surgery or any type of medical procedure, make sure to wait for the go-ahead from your doctor before you fly. This is particularly important if you've had brain, eye, orthopedic, or stomach surgery, or even if you've had an injury to any of these parts of your body. Also, if you've recently had a heart attack or stroke, it's not a good time to fly.

According to the Washington Post, many doctors advise against traveling for one month or more following a procedure. This is often to avoid blood clots. A blood clot that forms in the leg can become life-threatening if it breaks off and makes its way to the lungs. The risk of developing blood clots is even greater if your surgery was below the waist. Blood clots are more likely to develop when a person is immobile and/or dehydrated, two hallmarks of flying.

While cancer alone doesn't mean you can't fly, the treatments you've had might. If you've recently had a stem cell transplant, you're at a greater risk for getting an infection. Many doctors will recommend that you don't fly after a stem cell transplant, especially since you'll have to see your doctor for checkups and follow-up treatments during this period. When your blood counts have stabilized – about a year after the procedure – your doctor will likely approve air travel.

If you're traveling abroad for surgery, you'll want to arrange a place to stay once you're out of the hospital, allowing for enough time to recover before making the trip back home.

If Your Weight Puts You at Risk

Obesity is a major problem in the U.S. As of 2016, more than 93 million adults were obese, which accounts for 39 percent of the population. This is a problem for children, too, with approximately 12 million children being overweight. The obesity epidemic results in a number of health issues, including diabetes and heart disease.

Obesity impacts health in a number of ways. Health risks of obesity include high blood

pressure, heart disease and osteoarthritis, all of which can be risky or worsened when flying. High blood pressure can worsen during air travel, and the risks are greater on long flights. Osteoarthritis can cause stiffness after sitting for several hours, making it uncomfortable to move around once you've reached your destination. Obesity may even put a person at greater risk for developing blood clots, which are a greater concern during air travel.

Deciding Not to Fly

Showing up at your destination and having to immediately find medical treatment isn't just unpleasant, it's dangerous – you don't know the best doctors or hospitals in the area, and if you're in another country the healthcare system could be totally different. While it's inconvenient to cancel a flight and lose money on your ticket, you could be facing a major health crisis or a lot of discomfort if you opt to fly when you're not well enough.

Image by Jeshoots

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