



6 Tips for the Traveling Athlete – (*protecting your travel, health, and training effort*)



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Individuals may think these tips are overboard after reading (no pun intended), however, I beg to differ. I am constantly thwarted by thinking of every possibility that may provide an elite athlete with the slightest advantage to enable them to thrive when it matters the most! Did you know that researchers say if your chance of becoming ill on a flight with someone that is within 3.2 feet radius, is around 80%?

You see, at this point I have seen almost everything.

Yes!! I have seen an athlete trying to make a national

team with their up-coming event being the most important of their entire career and yes, the athlete got sick on the flight for some reason. So, a prevented action plan is worth exploring! Let's explore some options you have and I will implore you to not take your chances with your travel. Implementation with a simple yet detailed process for travel which "could and should" be your future habit to protect yourself and all your efforts!

Tips to give you the best opportunity for success when traveling

1. **Create your personal travel kit!** – go to the store and buy these things for each separate flight. Make sure you have enough for your layover and return flights. "Researchers tested six types of bacteria and learned that MRSA could last for up to 168 hours on the back pocket of an airplane chair, while E. coli could remain active for 96 hours on the armrest. Although bacteria lived longer on porous surfaces and for shorter periods of time on hard plastic surfaces, those plastic surfaces were the most efficient at transmitting it to the next set of hands. Think of an armrest, the remote control or window shade, as well as the door handles of the bathroom".
 - a. **Athlete Travel Kit: Items**
 - i. Disinfection wipes
 - ii. Hand sanitizer
 - iii. Gloves/rubber
 - iv. Ear plugs
 - v. Sleep visor/eye mask
 - vi. Face mask
 - vii. Bennie/hat

viii. Meds/supplements – Airborne, E-mergency, melatonin, Advil, anti-diarrheal, Neosporin/antibacterial ointment etc.

2. **Assess the scene!** – once boarded, you must assess the scene. In sports medicine we always assess the scene during an emergency response. Why? Because, we must know what we are dealing with! Is the area safe for me? I do not want to put myself in harm's way. Do you?



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- a. **So, look around at fellow passengers.** Are they coughing, sneezing, blowing their nose, do they look pale or sick? The **#1 risk of contracting an illness is from another passenger and not the environment** according to Dr. Martin Cetron the Director of global migration and quarantine for the CDC.
 - b. **Look at your environment** – how clean is your seat area?
 - c. **If available, adjust the airflow above your head** – airplanes have the state-of-the-art filtration system. The likelihood of airborne illness not being swept up and away forever is very small. On some flights you can adjust the airflow above you which can create a cone of protection dispersing airborne viruses away from your nose and mouth.
 - d. **Swab your nostrils with a little antibacterial ointment** – reduce the risk of microbes from entering into your system.
3. **Ask to switch seats!** – Scene is not safe :-/ - ask politely to the flight attendant that you would like to change seats if possible due to a passenger being sick next to you or in the near vicinity. If you are unable due to a full flight and no empty seats, follow these steps.
- a. **Aisle seats are the most prone for infection and illness** = around 80% to be exact! If there is someone ill in your row, seat in front, or behind you have an 80% increased risk of becoming ill.
 - b. **Window seat and stay there** – least likely to become sick at a window seat with a chance of becoming ill is around 10-30% (that is if they are not sitting directly next to you).
 - c. **If you cannot escape** - Put on your face mask!
 - d. **Do not allow the very nice but sick passenger next to you handle your cup, tray, or anything of yours.**
 - e. **Do not spark a conversation with someone that is sick (now they are speaking and breathing directly on you and you are breathing in their respiratory illness.**
 - f. **Avoid airline pillows if possible** – we are unsure if all pillow cases are being replaced during a 10-15 min cleaning turnover process. Yikes! What if the person before you were really ill? Avoid magazines or other media material in the seat pocket as well.

4. **Clean your area:** (use your amazing travel kit in a systematic fashion).



Step 1 – put on disposable rubber gloves

Step 2 – clean arm rests, clean tray table, latch and TV screen, clean seatbelt and seat, clean window shade etc...

Step 3 – inspect seat pouch for dirty surprise and clean (do not put your items in the front seat pouch).

Step 4 – clean bathroom, yes you could do a favor for the entire side of your plane. Clean the door handle, water nozzle, toilet seat, toilet flush button/handle (and get the hell out of there).

Step 5 – wash and clean your hands on a regular basis and **DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE** or EYES.

5. **Sleep/Rest** – this cannot be expressed enough! Sleep is the most important self-contributor of an onset of illness. Lack of sleep as well as increased stress can drastically decrease how well your immune system works to defend your body of illnesses.
- Sleep a couple extra hours two days before your leave on a long trip as well as prepare yourself for sleep on a flight even if you are not that tired.**
 - Take your melatonin from your travel kit ([USADA supplement information 411](#) or [NSF certified for sport](#))** – many athletes swear by it and others say it does not do much... The only way you will know is if you try it for a few trips.

6. **Airplane food & beverage** – we all know airplane food it is not the best tasting food... and therefore not very nutritious as well.

- If you can **bring your food on the plane**, you may not want to change your diet all that much before such an important event. Having gastrointestinal dysfunction can rapidly change your day as well as potentially dehydrate your body.

- Refrain from hot beverages** e.g. coffee and tea – one source stated that water tanks on older airplanes are not that clean and the water quality isn't well known. Better to be safe than sorry when drinking a cup of coffee that is quite possibility is the worst cup of coffee you may have ever had.

- Stay hydrated** – **please continue to drink bottled water while on a flight!** Many athletes do not realize that dehydration can affect your brain's executive function and reaction speed time. I cannot think of two more important factors for fencers performance than these mental and physical demands. Can you?



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Hope these tips will keep you from illness as well as establishing an amazing habit throughout your travel life!