

7 Tips for Healthy Traveling... Without Your Digestion Going South

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

In the last month, my wife Christine, and I have been in 7 airports, 2 bus stations, 3 taxis, and a rental car. We have eaten in the homes of famous chefs, enjoyed plums and walnuts right off a tree and have devoured our way through at least 40 different restaurants in 4 countries and 2 Greek Islands. In all this time we have managed to stay well both physically and more specifically digestively. For me, this is a rather major feat as I have always had a sensitive digestive system. I credit our wellbeing to some common sense rules and, of course, luck. Part of good travel preparation should always include preparing for being unlucky. The more you prepare, the better your chances of having an amazing adventure filled vacation with few, if any, unfortunate “incidences”.

Here are my tips for a vacation filled with healthy digestion:

- 1. Don't go too far off the 'eatin' path Part 1.** Part of the adventure of vacation is trying new, delectable and exotic dishes, but be careful with your food choices especially if you know that they might cause problems. Traveling can be challenging if you have issues with lactose intolerance, gluten resistance, or food allergies, but many restaurants around the world will work with you. Most places want you to be healthy just as much as you do! You can also plan ahead by bringing Lactaid or your own gluten free bread.
- 2. Don't go too far off the 'eatin' path Part 2.** In most cases our intuition will keep us from making really bad food safety choices, but keep your eye out for street vendors without refrigeration or the ability to wash their hands, dirty restaurant kitchens, and overly “buggy” restaurants.

3. **Don't drink un-bottled water and drink lots of bottled water.** If you are traveling to other countries (or even to some parts of the U.S.) you may want to consider drinking bottled water. We often purchase a huge jug of water and then refill our smaller water bottles as needed. Traveling, in itself, can cause dehydration, as well as drinking excessive amounts of alcohol or coffee, eating salty foods, and being in the sun too long. Try to have water with you at all times.
4. **Bring "just-in-case" medications with you.** I am going to tell you from experience that if you are far away from home and suddenly hit with a really bad case of diarrhea you don't want to spend even 5 minutes searching for a drug store. Hopefully, you don't experience any digestive problems while traveling, but trust me, if you do have problems you will be glad that you prepared ahead. My digestive travel Rx kit includes the following: antacids, anti-diarrheal medicine, and anti-gas pills. You may also consider probiotics, ibuprofen, and a vitamin supplement as well. Check with your physician if you have questions about what to bring.
5. **Stay away from raw seafood.** We recently stayed on an island that not only had no hospital, but the only way to a hospital was via a one-hour helicopter ride. This was not a place to be overly adventurous choosing potentially hazardous foods. If you are going to chance eating raw oysters or sushi make sure you are a short ambulance ride away from a reliable hospital.
6. **Avoid constipation.** Traveling can often mean long periods of sitting, eating processed foods, and being dehydrated. This can all lead to constipation. We solve any issues with constipation by walking as much as possible (even in airports or bus stations), drinking lots of water, and not veering too far off our usual Mediterranean diet. We also bring a container of prunes with us that are delicious snacks on the run.
7. **Avoid heartburn.** Heartburn and acid reflux can ruin your day, make it hard to sleep, and cause more severe issues over time. The best way to avoid heartburn on the road is to stay away from the foods that cause your heartburn. For most people, this includes spicy, fried, and acidic foods as well as alcohol, coffee, and sugary drinks. Also, be careful not to lay down right after eating (even if you are on the beach or sitting in a hammock).

May your travels be full of fun and adventure, and may the food you choose be delicious! Above all, may you be safe and healthy!