

There are a number of health and safety issues associated with air travel. For this reason, when flying for work purposes, it is important to consider the potential risks to health and safety and plan your travel arrangements to eliminate or minimise these risks. To assist in this process, the following guidelines should be considered before you undertake work related air travel.

FLIGHT RELATED HEALTH ISSUES:

Jet Lag

Rapid travel across time-zones can result in alteration to the body's normal **circadian rhythm** (our internal 24-hour biological clock) leading to symptoms that can last for days. Symptoms can include:

- sleep disturbance
- fatigue
- difficulty concentrating
- impaired judgement
- irritability
- headaches
- digestive upsets.

Jet lag is worst when travelling eastward. To minimise the effects of jetlag, where possible try implementing the following strategies:

- **Alter your sleep and meal patterns** a few days before flights so that you synchronise with the time zone of your destination prior to arrival. For example, if travelling to a destination that has a 2 hour time difference from your original location, try going to bed and having dinner an hour earlier/ later on two days before departure, and repeat this again on the following day, before flying.
- **Schedule flights so that you arrive in daylight hours** and maximise your exposure to daylight to 'reset' your body clock.
- **Nap** briefly when sleepy during the day to improve alertness: no longer than 30 minutes, and not within 4 hours of your new bedtime.
- **Minimise extra caffeine**, that is, only consume the caffeine intake you are accustomed to and strictly avoid caffeine two hours before sleeping.
- **Exercise** during daylight hours, especially early morning as this may assist with resetting your clock.
- **Avoid taking sleeping tablets** (unless medically prescribed), as this can reduce your ability to respond to emergencies during and following the flight.
- **Avoid consuming alcohol on flights** as it can decrease sleep quality and worsen the dehydration associated with air travel.

Gas Expansion Effects on the Body

As an airplane ascends, gases in body cavities such as the sinuses, middle ear, and gut expand and then contract again when the plane descends. The body usually deals with this by redistributing the gas (for example, equalising the pressure between sinuses). If the body is unable to effectively redistribute expanding gases, discomfort can result. To assist in managing the effects of gas expansion on the body consider the following:

- Avoid flying if you have an ear, nose or sinus infection, or are unable to clear your ears.
- Yawning, swallowing and chewing actions can help to permit equalisation between sinuses.
- Eat slowly and avoid gas forming foods and carbonated drinks before and during flights.

Fatigue

Travel time is time on duty. Consider your travel time carefully in the context of managing fatigue when planning your week. Further information on the [Fatigue Management](#) is available.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

Sitting still for prolonged periods of time is a risk factor for DVT. Further advice on preventing [Deep Vein Thrombosis \(DVT\) and Long Distance Travel](#) is available on the Comcare website.

Pregnancy

Although commercial air travel is considered safe for normal pregnancies, due to the prolonged lack of access to urgent medical assistance, many airlines require medical clearance for those in their third trimester. Physicians may also caution against air travel for those at risk of pre-term labour or those whose pregnancies are considered high risk. It is therefore recommended that you consult your physician prior to travelling when pregnant.

Security

You can be a target of opportunistic crime when travelling. Remember to be security conscious at all times, particularly watching out for:

- Suspicious behaviour, such as people following you or glancing at you repeatedly.
- Pick-pockets, particularly in busy places like airports, tourist attractions or crowded markets.
- Anyone who asks too many personal questions and/or invasive or suspicious questions about you or your work plans.
- Anyone who wants to know your personal or work details without demonstrating a legitimate reason.

As a general principle, do not accept drinks or food from strangers; do not carry items for other people and never share taxis with strangers.

INCIDENTS

Staff who have experienced health and safety issues related to flying should report this as an incident to Konekt Response on: 1300 880 777 or response@konekt.com.au. Staff who routinely experience health and safety impacts from flying should discuss their need to fly with their Senator or Member, with a view to eliminating or minimising the need to fly in the course of work duties.