

BY DIANE O'CONNELL

**b**efore she was pregnant, Heather Weiler, a personal fitness trainer in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, relished the time with her husband on the long car trips they frequently took together. "When I found out I was expecting, I didn't think that should interfere with our habit of jumping in the car whenever we felt like it," she recalls. But Heather had to make a few adjustments over those nine months. She made sure that going to the bathroom was the very last thing she did before getting in the car, for example. And while she had always read to her husband as he drove, reading now made her nauseous. "I spent more time looking at the scenery," she says, "and we had some great discussions."

What better time than summer to take a trip? Traveling is a great way to build in some quality time with your partner before the baby arrives. However, whether you're going by plane, train, or car, your pregnancy requires that you take some special precautions.

Before you make reservations, be sure to consult your obstetrician. "Every pregnant woman's medical condition is different, and what's considered safe travel for one woman may not be safe for another," says Janice K. Marks, M.D., an obstetrician at Lenox Hill Hospital, in New York City.



Taking a break to stretch your legs helps reduce your risk of blood clots.

# Hints for healthy travel

Frequent pit stops, lots of water, and other precautions you need to take.

Conditions that rule out any type of travel include a high risk of preterm delivery; spotting in the first trimester; a history of pregnancy-induced hypertension; or carrying twins if you're past your 25th week, says Edward Maeder,

M.D., a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis.

The ideal time to travel is usually your second trimester. "Most women don't have the symptoms of early pregnancy, such as nausea, or the discomforts of later pregnancy and fear of possible delivery," says Maeder. No matter when you're going, it's a good idea to get the name of a local obstetrician. *(Continued)*

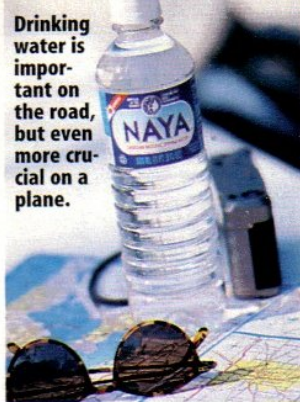
## As They Grow | pregnancy

Your doctor may suggest avoiding certain destinations. Marks advises against traveling to underdeveloped countries or islands where medical facilities don't meet Western standards of care. And high-altitude areas, such as Denver, should be off-limits. "The decreased oxygen in the air reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood that goes to the baby," she says, noting that women living at high altitudes develop higher blood counts to compensate.

If you're not traveling very far, going by car is a great pregnancy option: You can leave and stop any time you want. But however you travel, here are some suggestions for a safe, smooth ride.

**Always wear a seat belt.** Injuries sustained in traffic accidents while not wearing a seat belt are one of the leading causes of death in pregnant women, according to studies by Maeder. "You must wear a seat belt even if your car has an

**Drinking water is important on the road, but even more crucial on a plane.**



air bag," he warns. The fetus will rarely be harmed if the car stops quickly.

The best way to buckle up: Put the lap belt under your abdomen and across your thighs, and the shoulder belt between your breasts and over your shoulder.

**Sit comfortably.** If you're not driving, adjust your seat as far back as it will go so you can straighten out your legs. Similarly, if you're taking a long train trip, arrange to have a sleeper car.

**Make frequent pit stops.** "Every hour or so, I had to get out of the car so my legs wouldn't cramp up," recalls Heather Weiler. Stretching your legs also makes good medical sense. "You have a higher risk of blood clots in pregnancy, and sitting for a long time increases that risk," says Barbara Luke, Sc.D., an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Michigan Medical School, in Ann Arbor.

**Don't travel too far in the last trimester.**

Talk to your physician about the maximum distance he recommends so that

you can get back in time if you think you're in labor. "You must seek medical attention immediately, however, if you have regular contractions or vaginal bleeding," says Janice Marks.

Although airlines usually let pregnant women fly up to 36 weeks, Marks advises that you forgo plane travel after 28 to 30 weeks. "You don't want to put yourself in the position where medical care is inaccessible if you go into labor 30,000 feet in the air." (This is rare, but it has happened!)

Here is some additional advice to help you fly comfortably and uneventfully.

**Visit your doctor right before you leave.** Your obstetrician should make sure you have no indications of early labor, notes Marks. Susan Rosh, of New Rochelle, New York, who is in her sixth month, is planning a trip to Florida for a "last hurrah," she says. "Even though I just saw my doctor, she wants me to come back right before my flight to make sure my cervix isn't dilated," she says. "If it is, I'm going to have to cancel my trip."

Beth Weinhouse, a writer in Weehawken, New Jersey, who traveled for business throughout

**Be sure to buckle up: Put the lap belt under your belly and the shoulder strap between your breasts.**



her pregnancy, always took documentation with her. "I had a doctor's note saying I had a normal pregnancy and what my due date was, in case someone tried to prevent me from boarding the plane," she says.

**Sit on the aisle.** That goes for trains as well as planes. Besides facilitating frequent trips to the bathroom, having an aisle seat makes it easier to stretch your legs. Barbara Luke advises walking up and down the aisle once or twice an hour and doing simple stretches.

**Eat lightly and bring your own food.** "Have a low-fat meal before your flight," recommends Luke. "Fat takes a long time to digest, especially when you're pregnant," she says, and that can lead to heartburn or nausea. "It's not always easy to get food when you need it, and often you can't wait until the meal is served to eat. Having food with you can stave off nausea or low blood sugar."

**Drink plenty of water.** Most airlines keep the air humidity at an ultralow 15 to 20 percent—whereas 40 to 60 percent is comfortable, and less than 20 percent is considered desert conditions, according to the National Weather Service. When humidity is this low, your body's own moisture gets depleted as you breathe, which can result in dehydration. "Dehydration increases your risk of preterm labor," says Marks. She recommends drinking at least two glasses of water an hour during flights.

Going on a trip with your partner before your baby arrives is well worth the extra effort. It may be the last time for a while that the two of you enjoy a trip without diapers, bottles, and cries of "Are we there yet?" □

*Diane O'Connell, a writer who lives in Forest Hills, New York, specializes in health and parenthood issues.*

## Avoiding traveler's sickness

**Visiting certain countries, such as Mexico, carries additional risks for pregnant women.**

**Eat or drink the wrong thing and you may find yourself with a nasty case of traveler's diarrhea. The resulting dehydration could bring on preterm labor, and you may need to take**

**medication that ordinarily wouldn't be advisable. If you do get diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids, and do not take any over-the-counter medication without checking with a doctor first. Here are the best ways to avoid getting sick.**

- Drink only bottled water, bottled soft drinks, hot tea, broth, and pasteurized milk.

- Avoid using glasses that might have been washed in impure water. Drink directly from bottles or use paper cups, and don't use ice.

- Stay away from unpeeled or uncooked fruits and vegetables.

- Don't eat raw or undercooked meat; it may contain organisms that cause toxoplasmosis, a disease that can injure the fetus.

- Avoid foods that may have been cooked earlier in the day and reheated, such as quiche, lasagna, or casseroles.