

Flying with a Baby or Toddler

In recent years, air travel has become much more difficult because of security restrictions. Traveling with a child is even trickier. Nobody likes the thought of being confined in tight quarters with a crying baby or whining child. But don't let that scare you away from flying. If you plan ahead and follow a few guidelines, your flight can be a good one.

Prepare ahead of time

Probably the most important advice when flying with an infant or young child is to prepare well in advance. Check with the airline for any requirements or new regulations for flying with a baby. This helps you plan for anything you may encounter when flying with children. Questions to ask include how many pieces of luggage you may bring, whether breast milk, juice, or other liquids are allowed on the flights, age requirements for a child sitting in your lap, and whether you can store a push chair or car seat on the flight.

If your child is young enough, you must decide if you want to hold your baby in your lap or purchase a ticket so that the baby can be seated in a child restraint seat that keeps baby safe. Even if you don't purchase a ticket for the baby, many airlines require you to notify them that a baby will be sitting with you.

Packing is a vital part of your trip. You don't want to over pack and have too many bags to carry around at the airport, but you also don't want to forget any important items that can make your trip easier. If your children are older, you may wish to pack their own personal items in a light rucksack that they can carry themselves onto the plane.

You will also need to decide if you will need a car seat or push chair for your trip. You may need to check your push chair and car seat as luggage, but some airlines allow parents to bring them directly to the gate for storage in the plane's cargo hold.

If your baby requires a bottle of formula or expressed breast milk during the flight, you will need to declare these items and show them at the security gate. You should generally only bring enough to get you and the baby through the flight. Most airlines can also provide water for the bottle, and can even heat bottles. Be careful to check the bottle temperature in this case!

Things to bring for the flight

To keep your baby or toddler happy on a flight, bring several different things to break up the monotony. Age-appropriate snacks and food are always useful for calming children down, and you can't rely on airline food to work for your child. Make sure the food you bring doesn't require refrigeration and isn't too messy. Snacks could include dried fruit such as cranberries or raisins, cereal or granola bars, and crisps or crackers.

You may want to bring something for your child to drink as well. Airlines don't always have milk or other drinks you wish your child to have. Make sure you are allowed to bring your drinks through security, or purchase them in the terminal once you get through security.

You may also want to bring a change of clothing for your baby or child in case of accidents or spills. You may also find it helpful to bring an extra shirt or blouse for yourself. This protects you against embarrassing spills or baby accidents.

Bring a plastic bag or request one from a flight attendant. This bag can hold any rubbish you accumulate during the flight, and it can also hold dirty nappies and any clothing that gets soiled.

The other vital items to have on hand during a flight are things to keep your child entertained. Distractions help make the flight seem shorter and help prevent boredom or tantrums. Helpful items include books to read, coloring books or other activity books, and possibly a portable DVD player with your child's favorite movies.

Precautions and other helpful advice

Most parents will tell you to make sure to use the toilet before boarding the airplane. This will ensure fewer accidents and fewer trips to the tiny airplane toilet.

In order to exit the plane quicker (and this may be relevant if you have a fussy child at the end of the flight), book seats near the front of the plane. At the end of a long flight, you will be glad you chose the front of the plane.

During takeoff and landing, air pressure in the cabin can put pressure on little ears. If your child is too young to suck on candy or chew gum, breastfeed or bottle feed the baby during those times. Some doctors may recommend offering your child pain medication such as Tylenol or ear drops. Check with your healthcare provider to get recommendations for flying.

And don't forget to check with the airline for any rules or regulations that may affect your travel.

Traveling with a child definitely requires extra preparation and work. You will have to pack extra things and plan ahead for accidents and other scenarios. It isn't easy, but if you prepare, a flight with your baby or toddler can be a smooth and pleasant part of your trip.