

TRAVEL SICKNESS

Introduction

Travel sickness, or motion sickness, is when you feel sick or vomit because you are moving. It is caused by repeated unusual movements during travelling.

This includes travel in a vehicle such as a car, plane or boat, and other activities such as fairground rides.

Travel sickness is common. Children experience travel sickness more often than adults, but they often grow out of it as they get older.

Symptoms

Symptoms of travel sickness may include:

- nausea,
- vomiting,
- yawning,
- becoming cold and sweaty and turning pale,
- producing excess saliva,
- rapid breathing, and
- headaches.

These symptoms often worsen as the journey continues, but usually get better quickly, once the journey is over. In a few people the symptoms go on for a few hours, or even days, after the journey ends.

Causes

During motion, the part of the ear involved in balance sends signals saying that the body is moving, whereas the eyes indicate that the body is relatively stationary. This conflict produces the symptoms of travel sickness.

Treatment

Your GP can prescribe medicines for travel sickness prevention, or you can buy them over-the-counter (OTC) at your pharmacy.

Antihistamines such as cinnarizine (stugeron[®]) may also be useful. They need to be taken at least two hours before travelling and will help with travel sickness for about eight hours. Cinnarizine very occasionally causes drowsiness, but cause less drowsiness than other medications such as hyoscine.

Hycosine (Joyrides[®]) works by preventing the confusing nerve signals going to your brain and is available over the counter in pharmacies. They need to be taken around 30 minutes before you travel to be most effective, and the dose may need to be repeated during long journeys. Side effects include sleepiness, dry mouth and blurring of the vision, although these side effects are unusual at the low doses used for travel sickness.

Promethazine (phenergan[®]), another antihistamine, also causes drowsiness, so it may be useful for young children on long journeys.

Medication should be started before symptoms have appeared as most are ineffective once sickness occurs.

Also try getting some fresh air, sipping some cold water and taking a short walk if possible.

Alternative treatments include ginger, which can be eaten in a biscuit, in tea or can be crystallised. Peppermint may also help, which can be sucked as a sweet or drunk as a tea.

You may also find that acupressure bands worn on the wrists are helpful in improving the symptoms of travel sickness.

Practical Points

- Do not eat large meals or drink alcohol before or during travelling.
- Children are less likely to feel sick if they can see out of the car.
- Do not focus on something close by such as a book or film. Look at objects in the distance, or better still, close your eyes and try to sleep.
- Make sure the car is well ventilated. Stop for a break and a stretch regularly throughout the journey.
- On a boat, go on deck and get as much fresh air as possible and focus on the horizon. If you cannot go outside, sit in the middle of the boat, where it moves least. If you feel sick lie down and keep your eyes closed.
- In a plane, try and sit over the wings where it is most stable.
- If you are sick, replace lost fluids with frequent small sips of cold, still water and breathe slowly and deeply through your mouth.