

AirSafe.com Family Air Travel Guide

By Todd Curtis

AirSafe.com Family Air Travel Guide:
Your guide for taking the stress out of your family's next trip

By Todd Curtis

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Why I Wrote This Book

I've had a more than 40-year relationship with air travel, ever since my first trip in an airplane back in 1970. Like most children, my first trip in a plane was a combination of both apprehension and excitement. Fortunately, the apprehension came first, and was far less intense than the excitement. At the time, I didn't think of what was going through the minds of my parents, and only when I first flew with my own child did I have an appreciation of what they were going through.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to fly with not only my child, but with other children around the world, on both short and long trips, dealing with all kinds of challenges from changing diapers in an airplane lavatory to giving a teenager the confidence to fly alone to distant shores.

Having been closely involved for over two decades with airline safety and security issues as an engineer, advocate, and occasional on-air expert made me acutely aware of a whole range of issues that were well beyond my personal experience, but were frequently very real issues for parents and children around the world. Very few of these issues were potentially life-threatening, but many of them could have a very negative impact on a family's trip, issues as simple as lost luggage and as nerve-wracking as having a child stranded alone thousands of miles from home.

The purpose of this book

The goal of this book is quite simple. I want to give parents the insights to deal with many of the problems that they may face when they take an airline flight with their child, or when a child has to fly alone. Since no book can cover every possible problem that can happen, I also want to give parents and children a way of looking at each trip in a way that will let them anticipate problems before they occur and take positive steps to keep those problems from getting in the way of their trip.

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How to Read This Book

This book is designed as a reference book, so you don't have to read it from start to finish. Instead, you can read only those sections that apply to your situation. Also, because the book is designed as an ebook to be read on a smartphone, Kindle, iPad, or similar device, there are numerous internal links between relevant sections of the site, so if you are reading about a particular issue, you can easily link to related information in the book, and sometimes to related information online. You can also use the search function of your reading device to find the subjects that are of interest to you.

What this book covers

This book focuses on common problems faced by families that travel by air, and is arranged in the following broad categories:

- * Issues that happen every flight
- * Security Issues
- * General Baggage Issues
- * Other Issues

Suggested Ways to Read this Book

The easiest way to read this book is to [go to the table of contents](#) and choose a subject that is of interest to you. Each section has multiple links to related sections of the book, and sometimes to related online resources.

The following sections provide an introduction to a wider area of interest, and have many links to related sections:

[The Typical Airline Trip](#) - Provides an overview of the process of planning a trip by air, including tasks such as purchasing your tickets, choosing your seats, and packing your bags. If you have never traveled by air before, or have never traveled with young children, this is a good starting point.

[The Security Screening Process](#) - This section describes the general security screening process that is followed by most airports around the world, with a particular emphasis on the procedures and restrictions of the TSA.

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#) - This is a starting point for baggage related issues, and has links to all the key baggage issues covered by this book.

Using the Table of Contents

Think of the [table of contents](#) as you would the home page of a web site. You can reach every section of the book from a link in the table of contents, and at the end of every section is a link back to the table of contents. Within each article or section there will be one or more links that will take you to related material.

Just like a web site, one way to find information is to use the search function of your device. Kindles, Nooks, iPads and ebook apps such as Apple's iBooks app or the [free](#)

[Kindle app for smartphones and tablets](#) allow readers to look for specific words and phrases within the book. If you don't find what you want on the first try, use different words for the same concept to see if another part of the book has the information that you want.

Getting the ebook version of this Guide

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Feedback and questions

If you want to contact the author Dr. Todd Curtis, or if you have any suggestions, feel free to pass them along. [Visit the About the Author section](#) at the end of this book for contact information.

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Risk Management Basics

Flying on an airliner has become much safer and much more reliable over the years in large part because of a systematic approach that the airline industry has taken when it comes to dealing with problems. A significant part of that approach has been the use of the principles of risk management to deal with safety and security issues in aviation.

What is risk?

A risk is nothing more than some kind of unwanted event, combined with the likelihood of that event occurring. A risk is acceptable only if the combination of the consequences of that unwanted event and the likelihood of that outcome is low enough.

For example, any aircraft that flies may crash, and no passenger, and for that matter no flight attendant or pilot, would risk their lives to fly unless the likelihood of a plane crash was very, very low. However, a risk that has a very high chance of occurring, such as an aircraft encountering turbulence, is quite acceptable if the worst outcome (if you wear your seatbelt) is a spilled drink.

Fortunately, most of the risks parents and children face when they fly are both small and manageable, and families can use the same basic principles of risk management to deal with potential air travel. At its core, risk management consists of three things:

1. Identifying risks,
2. Understanding how those risks come about, and
3. Taking steps to manage those risks.

By understanding risks and their consequences, you can take steps to avoid problems entirely, make them less likely to occur, or reduce the consequences of problems should they happen.

The basics of risk management

This book will apply basic principles of risk management to deal with common problems that families face when flying with children. In order to manage a risk, three things have to happen:

1. **The risk has to be recognized** - Some risks, like being late for a flight, are obvious, while others, such as the physical effects on the body that happen during a typical flight, have to be explained before they are understood. While some risks can't be anticipated ahead of time, the ones that are discussed in this book are likely to happen at least once to families that fly regularly.

2. **The risk has to be manageable** - If something is beyond your control, it makes no sense to spend time or energy worrying about it. If you have some control over the situation, you can look at managing the effects of that risk. For example, an airline may lose, damage, or temporarily misplace your checked luggage. Once that happens, there is no way for you to undo the outcome, but if you can anticipate the possibility of the problem, there is plenty that you could do before the flight to either eliminate the risk or

to reduce the amount of potential inconvenience.

This book uses one or more the following three general approaches when making suggestions for managing risks faced by families: (a) avoid the possibility of a problem, (b) if a risk can't be avoided, then make it less likely to happen, and (c) set things up so that if the problem does happen there is a limited impact to your family.

3. The risk has to be acceptable - Every trip has risks, and if the risk is acceptable to you and your child, then you should go ahead with the trip. If it is not acceptable, then you either do something about that risk or don't take the trip. For example, if you are traveling with a valuable item like a laptop computer or your child's favorite toy, and you have a choice of keeping it with you as a carry-on item or putting it in a checked bag, if you know that checked items are more likely to be lost, damaged, or stolen, you would probably travel with it as a carry-on.

Families can manage their own risks

If you understand the kinds of issues that you are likely to face, and have some idea of how to deal with them, traveling with your children should not be a problem. It may take a little extra planning and work, but if you make the effort your reward will be a trip that will be at least a little less stressful, and much more enjoyable for you and your children. Being a good risk manager often boils down to doing the following:

* **Understanding what to expect** - If you know what should happen during your trip, from the time that you buy your tickets to the time when you end your journey, you will also know where the risks are.

* **Taking time to plan** - Planning can do three things for you when it comes to managing your risks. First, you may be able to avoid potential risks entirely. Second, if you can't eliminate the risk, you may be able to either reduce the impact of the risk, or put yourself in a position to easily manage it should it occur

* **Prepare to deal with a problem when it happens** - When air travel problems arise, and you've prepared yourself to deal with it, the problem may still be a bit of a shock, but one that you could easily handle. While you may have anticipated your most likely travel problems, you probably won't anticipate all of them. However, if you understand the basic approach this book takes to problems, you should be able to deal with almost any unexpected situation that comes up during your trip.

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The Typical Airline Trip

When you and your family travel by air, preparations for the trip can begin weeks or even months before you step on an airplane. Armed with a little knowledge of the issues you and your family may face, you and your family can plan more effectively for your trip and avoid many common problems.

What follows is a brief description of each part of your airline flight, and the kind of problems that you may have at each stage. The heading of each paragraph is a link to a section of the book that has additional details on how to deal with each issue.

[Getting the flight that you want](#)

In most cases, when you are traveling with your children you can plan to take flights that are convenient to you and that are reasonably priced. If you are comfortable with going online, you can usually get a very good idea very quickly of the price ranges and availability of tickets. The biggest risk is that if you wait too long, your flight may not have enough seats for your family, and the price may rise too high for your budget. You can manage this risk by purchasing your ticket as soon as you can after you make your travel decision.

[Getting the seats that you want](#)

Ideally, you would like to seat your family as closely together as possible. You may not be able to do this if there are no open seats that are adjacent, or if you are purchasing a bargain priced ticket that does not allow you to reserve seats ahead of time. If this is the case, this section has advice on actions you can take to get more desirable seats for your family.

[Keeping Your Family Safe at the Airport](#)

Although airports are some of the most heavily guarded public spaces you and your family will ever visit, it is still a place that has dangers for the unwary traveler. Fortunately, most of these risks are to your baggage and other personal property rather than threats to your life. This particular section will make you aware of what parts of the airport have the most risks, and what steps you can take to deal with those risks.

[Keeping Your Family Safe in the Air](#)

Being seriously injured or killed in a plane crash is a nightmare in the back of nearly every passenger's mind, but those kinds of risks are extremely rare, and there may be millions of flights worldwide for every one flight with a serious injury or death. This section of the book deals with risks that your family is far more likely to deal with on every flight, things like turbulence, items falling from overhead bins, pressure changes that affect ears and sinuses, and bad behavior from other passengers.

[Feeding Your Family in the Air and at the Airport](#)

How well you and your family are able to eat while at the airport or while in the air will depend on a number of things that are beyond your control, especially the amount of free time you may have in an airport, and the inflight food choices of your airline. This section explains your likely food options, and what you can do to keep your family,

especially infants and very small children, from going hungry.

Changing Diapers in the Air and on the Ground

If you are traveling with infants or children who are not yet toilet trained, this section suggests that you should be prepared to not only change diapers in the airport and on the plane, but also be prepared to both bring all your diaper supplies with you when you fly, and prepare to deal with soiled diapers in flight. This section gives you an overview of what to expect from airports and airplanes when it comes to diapers and air travel.

Using Child Restraints on Aircraft

For larger children and adults, using seat belts is a straightforward proposition. If you fly with infants or small children, this section explains that you have several choices when it comes to using restraints designed for infants and small children, and also discusses the possible consequences of those choices.

Packing for your Trip

When you travel with your family, you have a number of things to consider when it comes to packing, including what is not allowed in the aircraft and what you should never pack in checked luggage. This section describes many of the major issues you should consider when it comes to baggage, and points you to the extensive resources within this book that go into greater detail on many baggage issues.

Dealing with Airport Security

Airport security, whether in the US or elsewhere, can be a source of unnecessary delay and frustration if you don't have a basic understanding of the security screening process. This section provides a general overview of that process, as well as details on what items are restricted or banned.

Dealing with Unexpected Delays

Delays, either in flight or on the ground, are a normal part of air travel. This section describes the kinds of delays that are out of your control, as well as some of the delays that can be avoided with a little bit of planning.

Getting Your Child Ready to Fly

Whether your child is an infant, a teenager, or something in between, this section can give you advice on the things that you can do to prepare your child for a flight so that the flight is either more pleasant for your child or for others in your family.

Acceptable Inflight Behavior

This section discusses some of the acceptable social standards in the airline cabin when it comes to issues such as making noise, behavior toward flight attendants and other passengers, and the use of electronic devices.

Preparing Your Child to Fly Alone

While most typical flights involving your family will include one or more adults, sometimes your child may have to fly alone. Children fly alone for any number of reasons, and for most parents, it can be a source of stress. This section discusses the options parents have, including using an airline's unaccompanied child program. Also discussed are the differences between these programs, and the extra steps that should be

taken to avoid unacceptable situations for your child.

[Avoiding Common Air Travel Problems](#)

Most of the avoidable travel problems your family is likely to face will involve baggage, security, and unaccompanied children. What these all have in common is that by taking the proper actions before or during the trip, you and your family can either avoid these problems entirely, make them less likely to happen, or lessen the impact it has on your trip.

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Getting the Flight that You Want

Getting the flight that you want starts with knowing what kind of flight you need, and what kind of limitations that you and your airline have when it comes to getting a reservation. If you know a little bit about how the process works, you will be less likely to run into problems.

How the ticketing process works

On the surface, it is a very simple process. You look to see what options are available, and if it fits your needs and budget, you and the airline strike a deal. The process can be easy or hard, depending on your situation. One of the things that you can control is your understanding of the process. You understand your family's needs and limitations, and if you know a bit about process from the airline's perspective, you will be in better shape to make a deal. A few things you should know about the airline tickets:

- * How much you get charged depends on several factors
- * The earlier you buy, the more choices you have
- * Lower priced tickets usually have more restrictions
- * Children usually don't get a discount
- * The deal isn't done until you pay for your ticket

Understanding what to expect

Depending on where you are flying, you may have many different options from several different airlines, and unless you want to spend a lot of time comparing options or prices, you should either use a travel agency, or visit an online service such as Kayak.com or Expedia.com.

If you are comfortable going online, you can very quickly spot the options that work for you. Once you figure out your best option, you should then contact the airline directly or go to that airline's web site to reserve your flight. It is usually best to order tickets directly from the airline because it is usually easier to deal with the airline if you later have to make changes to the ticket or have problems with the reservation.

Another issue is that some airlines may not show up on third-party travel web site. Southwest is one of the larger airlines that does not have its information on these third-party sites. If you know that an airline flies to the city you will be visiting, contact that airline to check their flight options.

Taking time to plan

If you know when and where you want to go, making a plan well ahead of time will help you in two ways. First, ticket prices tend to go up the closer you get to your departure date, so an earlier purchase equals cheaper tickets. Second, the earlier you order seats, the easier it will be to seat your family together.

Anticipating the problems that may happen

Even if you have planned early and tried to make reservation well in advance, you still may not get the flights that you want at the price that you want. If seats are not available

for your preferred flight, you could check back periodically to see if seats become available. You could also consider alternatives like traveling on a different day.

You have less control over pricing. If you check back later, the prices will likely be higher, not lower. The best alternative may be to fly on another day or with another airline.

Pricing for children's tickets

Some airlines have discounted tickets for children, typically for children younger than 13 years old. When you order your tickets, you should see if there are discounted fares. In the US, children under the age of two can fly for free if the child is sitting on the lap of an adult. For international flights, airlines may charge a fee for lap children, so check with the airline if you plan to fly with a lap child.

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Getting the Seats that You Want

When you fly as a family, you typically want to sit together, and you definitely want to have a young child sitting next to a parent or another family member. If you know what kind of plane you will be using, and if you purchase your ticket early enough, you shouldn't have a problem getting seats that will make you and your family happy.

How airline seats are arranged

Airline seat arrangements depend on the aircraft you are flying in and on whether you are seated in the coach, business class, or first class cabin. While your airline may use several different airline models, within the airline the seat layout is typically the same for each model.

If you order your tickets from the airline's web site, most airlines provide a seat map of the aircraft to be used on that flight, and will indicate which seats are available. Online resources like SeatGuru.com or SeatExpert.com also provide seat maps of the different aircraft models used by larger airlines.

Suggested seating arrangements

The airlines have very few rules about where children can sit. One of the most important to remember is that children under the age of 16 are not allowed to sit in emergency exit rows. While there are very few seating rules for children, you should heed the following suggestions for seating your child:

- * Avoid putting small children in aisle seats because of the risk of getting injured by passing people and by serving carts.
- * Keep your family together whenever possible.
- * If the airline books you in separate areas, ask to be moved so you can sit together.
- * Avoid sitting close to the lavatories or the galleys because of the amount of noise and foot traffic.

Whatever works best for your family should be your preferred arrangement when you order tickets. If you are traveling with one small child and two adults, a sensible arrangement would be to have the child in the middle with a parent on either side. However, if you have two small children and two adults, but all the seats are in groups of three, you may prefer to have two pairs of adjacent seats or have one parent sit with the two children and the other parent in an adjacent row or across the aisle on the same row.

Understanding what to expect

Depending on how crowded your flight may be when you order your tickets, you may not get the ideal seats that you want. You should contact the airline prior to your departure and try to change your seats if you have a seating situation that you think is unacceptable.

Some fares have restrictions that include not assigning seats until the day of departure. If this is the case, contact the airline and put in a seating request based on your family's needs.

Taking time to plan

Your family's seating needs will depend on your situation and on the age of your children. For example, a seating arrangement that may be acceptable if you were on a short nonstop flight may not be acceptable on a much longer flight. If you know what works for your family, make that a requirement when you are looking for a flight. If there are several flight options for your destination, but your first choice flight doesn't have the seats that you want, consider looking at other flights.

Anticipating the problems that may happen

Seating problems are most likely to happen when there are unexpected changes due to flight cancellations, delays, or aircraft substitutions. If you find out that something about your flight has changed, contact the airline to confirm whether your new seating arrangement will work for your family.

Last minutes moves

If for some reason you didn't get the exact combination of seats that you want, you may not be out of luck. Sometimes seats may become available shortly before departure, or you may be able to make a seat switch either at check in or inside the plane. The following are a few suggestions for changing seats:

- * **Check for seat openings** - Other passengers may change their plans before the flight, so check with the airline periodically (either online or by phone) to see if you can change your seats.
- * **Look for an alternative flight** - See if the airline has another convenient flight with more open seats. Depending on the airline rules, this may cost you money.
- * **Show up early for check in** - Sometimes seats may become available shortly before departure, so when you get to the airport, check with the airline's gate agent or at the check in counter to see if any seats have opened up.
- * **Reserve seats that you can trade later** - Once you are on the plane, you may be able to switch seats with other passengers. This usually works best if you can ask someone with a middle seat to trade for a window or aisle seat. Depending on the configuration of your aircraft, you may have several options. For example, if there are three adjacent seats and you can book the window and aisle seat, you will likely be able to trade one of those seats with the person in the middle.

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Keeping Your Family Safe at the Airport

Most airports are divided into two areas, the public area that is accessible to anyone, and the secured area where only passengers and other authorized personnel are allowed. Most of the risks that you and your family will face will largely be risks of loss or theft of your personal property from the publicly accessible parts of the airport.

The four areas of risk in the airport

Every trip by air begins and ends at an airport, and if you have to change planes, you will deal with at least one other airport. The areas where you face the most risk at airports are:

1. In the terminal prior to security screening
2. During the screening process
3. In the terminal prior to boarding.
4. In the baggage claim area

Understanding what to expect

While airports are large public spaces with large numbers of people coming and going at all hours, they typically have a very noticeable police and security presence 24 hours a day. Inside the terminal, the greatest risks are having your property stolen, or forgetting to take your property with you.

The greatest risk of forgetting an item happens during the security screening process, where you may be separated from your carry-on items, especially if one of your family members gets selected for additional screening. You have to remember to put everything back in your bags or your pockets, and to make sure you leave the screening area with the same number of bags as when you arrived.

Once past screening and before boarding, not paying attention to your situation is your biggest risk. Small and valuable items like mobile phones and portable electronics are attractive targets for thieves, and baggage left unattended could be taken away by the police as a precaution.

If you have checked baggage, your checked bags are at risk at your destination because the baggage claim areas are typically in the public, unsecured area of the airport. Also, bags may be accidentally taken by someone because of mistaken identity. For more suggestions on how to deal with baggage claim issues, review the section [Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips](#).

Taking time to plan

There are many things you can do before you leave for the airport that will make it less likely that you will have a problem with forgetting items at the airport or becoming a victim of theft:

- * Travel with only carry-on baggage.

- * Travel with as few carry-on items as possible.
- * Have the first family member to pass through security be responsible to collect everyone's items.
- * Make valuable items like your laptop computer the last item you put on the conveyer belt for the x-ray machine.

Anticipating the problems that may happen

The most likely problem that you will have at the airport will be forgetting an item during security screening, or at baggage claim. If you are traveling with children old enough to carry their own bags, but who may be new to air travel, the airport environment may be confusing and stressful, so you may want to do one or more of the following:

- * Count the number of carry-on items that you have (carry-on luggage, backpacks, strollers, etc.) before you get to the security screening area, after the screening area, and before you board the airplane.
- * If you take items out of your pockets for screening, such as mobile phones and keys, remember to retrieve them after they are screened.
- * If one of your family members is selected for additional screening, make sure that someone is watching out for your carry-on items.
- * Once you are in the boarding area, make sure someone always stays with your bags.
- * At baggage claim, make sure that your baggage claim identification number on each claim ticket matches the information on the checked bag.
- * Make sure you leave the baggage claim area with the same number of items that you checked.

Additional Resources

[Avoiding Security Delays](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

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Keeping Your Family Safe in the Air

As a result of decades of work by dedicated professionals around the world, much of the serious, life-threatening risks of air travel have been greatly reduced. For example, in the last 10 years, there have been over 80 million domestic airline flights in the US, with only [five crashes that resulted in the death of passengers](#). Only one of those crashes involved the kind of large jet airliners that carry the vast majority of airline passengers.

While the risk of death or serious injury is extremely low, there are several other risks that should concern families that fly. Fortunately, it is very easy to reduce or even eliminate many of those risks. The most common risks that you should manage include:

- * Turbulence
- * Items falling from overhead bins
- * Blocked ears
- * Behavior of other passengers

Dealing with turbulence risks

Turbulence happens on just about every flight, but most of the time the amount of turbulence is very small, and the level of risk is very low. In those rare cases where the turbulence is severe, any passenger who is not buckled up can be seriously injured. Turbulence can happen in any phase of flight, but it's most likely to be hazardous during cruise when passengers and crew may be out of their seats and not belted in.

Managing turbulence is very simple. If you are in your seat, keep your seatbelt on. If the cabin crew tells you to return to your seat and put your seatbelt on, follow their instructions.

FAA recommended child restraints

How your child should be strapped in will depend on the size of your child. The FAA recommends that children who weigh more than 40 pounds (18.1 kg) can use a regular seatbelt. Children who weigh less should use an approved child safety seat or child safety harness. All child seats that are approved for use in cars in the US are also approved for use on US airliners. For additional information child restraints, visit the section [Using Child Restraints on Aircraft](#).

If you are flying with a lap child, there are no restraint devices that are approved for use by the FAA. You should not wrap your seat belt around your child, you should simply hold your child in your arms. This is riskier than having your child in an approved restraint device, and this may concern most parents. If this is a concern, you should consider purchasing an airline ticket for your infant or small child, and also use an approved car seat or other child restraint system.

Objects falling from the overhead bins

Because airlines now charge most passengers for each checked bag, unless you are on the rare flight with a lot of empty seats, the overhead bins will likely be full or close to full. One of the very common hazards of overhead bins is that items sometimes fall out.

Airlines allow passengers to have carry-on items that weigh up to about 40 pounds (18.2 kg), but you or your child can be injured by objects that weigh much less than that.

Not every seat will have this risk. If you are on a plane, look at the seats that are directly under a door for an overhead bin. Those are the seats that have the risk. Depending on what kind of aircraft you are on, and where you are sitting, typically only the aisle seat or the seat adjacent to the aisle seat are the ones that have the risk.

The risk from overhead bins can't be completely eliminated, but there is a lot that you can do to reduce your risk of injury:

- * Don't sit in a seat where you can be hit by a falling object from an overhead bin.
- * Put your child in a seat that has little or no chance of being hit by a falling item from an overhead bin.
- * Make sure that the door to the overhead bin is closed and latched.
- * Don't over pack the overhead bin that is over your head, or allow another passenger to do so.
- * If you think an overhead bin isn't properly latched or is over packed, tell a flight attendant.

Dealing with blocked ears

An ear blockage, sometimes called airplane ear, happens when there is a difference in pressure between the inner ear and the outside air. This is caused by changes in cabin pressure that happen as an airplane changes altitude.

While the passenger cabins of modern airliners are pressurized, they typically are set to a lower pressure than either the departure or arrival airport, so during the flight, the pressure in the cabin will drop after takeoff, and rise again as the airplane descends for landing.

Normally, your ears adjust to these pressure changes on their own, sometimes leading to a 'popping' of your ears as you change altitudes. If your ears have trouble adjusting to the pressure changes, it may cause some discomfort, and may not clear up until after you land. This condition is often more noticeable if you have a cold or nasal congestion that makes it harder for your ears to adjust to pressure changes.

If you or someone in your family has an ear block issue, doing something as simple as yawning, chewing gum, or swallowing may clear up the problem. For infants, sucking can also help them adjust to pressure changes.

You can't prevent this risk because every plane flight will have a significant change in cabin pressure during departure, and again while the airplane is descending for landing. You can deal with the problem when it happens by doing some combination of yawning, chewing gum, or drinking something until the problem goes away. For very young toddlers or infants, you may try to get them to suck on a bottle, breast, or pacifier

when the aircraft begins its descent for landing.

If the problem persists well after landing, you may want to seek medical attention in case the ear blockage is being caused by a more serious condition.

Passenger behavior issues

Most passengers mind their own business and will not bother you or your children during a flight. However, you may encounter a passenger who is behaving in a threatening or inappropriate manner. The most likely situation where this will happen is when a passenger is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

When it comes to alcohol consumption, the US and most other countries have very strict rules about when and where alcohol can be served, and whether minors are allowed to be present where alcohol is served. The inside of an airplane is one of the few places where most of those rules don't apply. Most airlines allow passengers to purchase and consume alcohol at any time of day, and have no restrictions on consuming alcohol while sitting next to unrelated children.

Unless a passenger is causing a problem, there is very little that you can do to stop a passenger from drinking alcohol near your child. However, if someone is clearly intoxicated, out of control, or acting in a threatening manner, contact a flight attendant, and if necessary move yourself and your child away from this passenger.

Another area of passenger behavior that may concern parents is when someone is reading a book or magazine, or watching on a computer or mobile phone something that is disturbing to your child, such as videos or photos depicting scenes of a violent or explicitly sexual nature.

In the US, there are very few limits on what someone can read or watch, and most airlines have few, if any, rules about limiting a passenger's choice of personal entertainment. However, if you are in a situation that is disturbing to you or your child, you should ask the passenger to stop what he or she is doing, and if necessary contact the flight attendant to help deal with the situation.

Additional Resources

[Using Child Restraints on Aircraft](#)

[Child Travel Advice from AirSafe.com](#)

[Using Electronic Devices on the Plane](#)

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Feeding Your Family in the Air and at the Airport

The title of this section is a bit misleading, because to get decent food, defined as healthy, tasty, and nutritious, it's unlikely to happen at either the airport or on your flight unless you bring it with you. Simply put, most airline flights are either too short to offer meal service, and those that do don't offer many choices, or any choices that would be ideal for small children.

Getting food at the airport

Most airports are not much better. It isn't a question of choice as much as it is a question of time. As the [Avoiding Security Delays](#) section shows, you may have to arrive at the airport as much as three hours before your flight, so if you plan on eating at the airport you may have to arrive even earlier.

If you are changing planes, you may not have the opportunity to eat before the next leg of your flight. Airlines typically schedule your connecting flight to leave within about 45 minutes after the arrival of your previous flight, and if your inbound flight is a little behind schedule or your next departure is from a gate on the far side of the airport, you may not have time to do much more than buy a drink or a snack.

Another thing to consider is the range of eating choices. About the only thing that you can rely on is that every airport will have vending machines with soft drinks, candy, and other snacks. Larger airports will likely have restaurants, but your best choice may not be convenient for you and your family. Unless you are very familiar with the airport and have extra time to spare, don't expect much from the airport.

Getting food in the airplane

The food options on most airline flights are much more limited than the options in the terminal. On most flights, about the only things that will be available on all flights are beverages. Water and soft drinks are free, and alcoholic beverages may either be free or available for purchase. Below is a summary of the typical food options you will have on most US airlines.

- * Only beverage service on flights of less than one hour.
- * No meal service on short flights of less than two hours, but sandwiches or snack boxes may be available for purchase.
- * Full meal service on longer international flights or nonstop transcontinental flights in the US.
- * Special meals (low salt, kosher, halal, Hindu, vegetarian) may be available on some flights that offer full meal service.

You can also check with your airline to see what meal options are available for your flight, or if the airline offers meal service on any of their flights. If you are flying first or business class, your food options will be much greater, and you likely would not be

charged for meals, snacks, or alcoholic beverages.

If you want to know what the food on your airplane flight may look like, check out the web site AirlineMeals.net. The site has thousands of pictures of airline meals from around the world, and allows you to search their database of photos by airline, class of seating, and date. You can review the site to see if your airline offers food that at least looks appealing and healthy.

Bringing your own food

Airlines allow you to bring food on the airplane. While security procedures may limit what kinds of liquids you are allowed to bring to the airport, you can usually buy a variety of beverages in the terminal before you board the airplane.

While many liquid and gel type food items from outside the airport are not allowed past the security screening area, the TSA has a number of exceptions for infants and small children. For details on both the restrictions and the exceptions, review the section [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#).

Because your flight may be diverted, delayed, or cancelled, you may be put into a situation where you may not have access to food. For that reason, you should always pack some kind of meal or snack in a carry-on bag so you can keep your children from getting too hungry during your wait.

Breast-feeding your child

The rules and regulations on breast-feeding while in flight are not at all clear. The FAA has no specific policies or regulations that the airlines have to follow, and airlines typically don't have any formal rules about breast-feeding. However, you should feel free to nurse your child on the aircraft, even if nearby passengers may not approve (that's their problem, not yours).

There is no realistic option for breast-feeding in private in an airline cabin (you should avoid doing so in the lavatory for any number of reasons), so doing so at your seat is usually your best option. If you plan on nursing your child, bring a small blanket or jacket to protect your privacy, as the airline may not have any blankets available on your flight.

Breast milk is one of the items the TSA will allow you to bring in your carry-on, even if your child is not with you. Just be sure to tell the security screener about it. If you have a problem with the screener, contact that person's supervisor to help resolve the situation.

Additional Resources

[The Security Screening Process](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

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Changing Diapers in the Air and on the Ground

If you are traveling with an infant or with a toddler who is not completely toilet trained, you will change diapers on the airplane or in the airport. While changing diapers in an airport will be little different from changing diapers in other public spaces, changing in the air takes a bit more planning and strategy.

A note on disposable diapers

If you normally use cloth diapers, consider using disposable diapers when you travel for two reasons. First, if you use cloth diapers, you will have to plan on carrying the soiled diapers until you have a chance to wash them. Second, if your flight is delayed, you may be carrying around soiled diapers for a lot longer than you planned.

Preparation is the key

Most airports don't have stores that sell disposable diapers or other diaper changing gear, so be prepared to bring all the diapers and other accessories that you may need during your trip. Remember that there are significant restrictions on liquid and gel containers, so be sure to pack lotions, ointments, and other liquid or gel diaper accessories that come in containers that are smaller than 100 ml (3.4 ounces).

One extra item that you may want to pack into your diaper bag are large sealable plastic freezer type bags. Airplane cabins are enclosed spaces, and anything that you can do to protect other passengers from odors would be greatly appreciated.

Changing at the airport

Most modern airports have mens and womens bathrooms that come equipped with changing tables, and many also have family restrooms that allow you more privacy to deal with any diaper issues.

Changing in the plane

Changing diapers in the plane can be easy or difficult depending on what facilities are available and whether you have anyone that can help you. The best case situation is that you are flying on an airplane that has one or more lavatories with a changing table, and you have someone else with you who can stand outside the door and help you with juggling the various items you will be handling (including your baby).

The worst case situation is that it is just you and the baby traveling, the plane is completely packed, there are no lavatories with a changing table, and changing at your seat is your only option. In short, you should plan for the worst case. In a worst case scenario, you will have to keep any soiled diapers with you until after the plane lands, so be sure that you have some way to store them, preferably in an airtight container like a Ziploc type sealable plastic storage bag.

How to pack your diapers

You should of course pack your diapers and diaper changing accessories in one of your carry-on bags, but you should also pack so that you will still have diapers and other essential items with you if the airline makes you check larger carry-on bags. In this

situation, the airline will allow you to keep bags that are small enough to fit under your seat, typically something the size of a large purse or a small backpack.

You can do this by having a separate bag for your baby items that is small enough to fit under a seat. You can also have this bag inside of a larger carry-on and take it out only if you are forced to check that carry-on.

Managing diaper issues

While you can't control when or where your child's diaper will have to be changed, there are some things that you can do to make this part of your trip a little easier:

- * Choose airlines that have changing tables in their lavatories.
- * Check to see if your child's diaper needs changing before you board the aircraft.
- * Keep enough diapers and diaper changing accessories in your carry-on bag to survive a long delay.
- * Travel with a waterproof changing mat in case you have to change your baby on your lap or on a seat.
- * Be prepared to dispose of soiled diapers after the end of the flight.
- * Carry extra diapers and at least one change of clothes for your baby just in case.

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Using Child Restraints on Aircraft

When you fly with a child under the age of two, most airlines have three options for how your child can fly:

1. **In your lap** - This is a free option for US domestic flights, but you may be charged for a lap child on an international flight.
2. **In a seat with an approved child restraint system (CRS)** - In the US, the FAA allows any child seat approved for use in cars to be used in aircraft. There are also harnesses and other devices that are specifically approved for use in aircraft.
3. **In a seat without an approved CRS** - Airlines don't require you to use any kind of restraint system for infants or very small children, but the FAA recommends that you use airplane seat belts for children who weigh at least 40 pounds (18.2 kilos).

FAA child safety recommendations

While the FAA does not mandate the use of car seats or other child restraint systems for smaller children, it does have a number of guidelines and recommendations:

- * Make sure your CRS is government approved and has "This restraint is certified for use in motor vehicles and aircraft" or "FAA Approved in Accordance with 14 CFR 21.305(d), Approved for Aircraft Use Only" printed on it.
- * Don't place a child in a CRS designed for a smaller or larger child than indicated in the manufacturer's instructions.
- * A child weighing less than 20 pounds (9.1 kilos) should use a rear-facing CRS.
- * A child weighing from 20 to 40 pounds (9.1 to 18.2 kilos) should use a forward-facing CRS.
- * Children weighing more than 40 pounds (18.2 kilos) may use a regular airplane seat and seat belt.

Other child restraint issues

There are other things that you may want to consider before using a CRS with your child:

- * Make sure your CRS will fit in the seat. Coach or economy seats in most aircraft are about 18 inches (45.7 cm) wide, and to make sure that your CRS will fit, make sure it is less than 16 inches (40.6 cm) wide.
- * Reserve adjoining seats.
- * Don't place your child in an aisle seat or in a seat that can be hit by items falling from an overhead bin.

Pros and cons of flying with a lap child

Flying with your child in your lap is an option when your child is younger than two. There are positives and negatives to doing so, and it is up to you to make the decision of what works best for your family:

Pro - You save money by not buying a seat.

Con #1 - On international flights you may still be charged for a lap child, and depending on the airline those charges may be close to the price of a regular ticket.

Con #2 - If you happen to bring a CRS with you, you may not be able to use it if there is no empty seat next to you, and you may be forced to check the CRS.

Con #3 - The number of carry-on items you can bring depends on the number of ticketed passengers, so your child will not have a carry-on baggage allowance.

Con #4 - If you are on a very long flight, you will probably have to remain awake for the entire flight, no matter how tired you are.

Con #5 - In the unlikely event of severe turbulence or an abrupt aircraft movement, you may not be physically able to hold on to your child.

Pros and Cons of using an approved child restraint system

If you will have a seat for your infant or small child, you should think about whether you want to use some kind of CRS for your child.

Pro #1 - Your child can be securely belted in during the flight

Pro #2 - You will be able to move around without disturbing your sleeping child.

Pro #3 - Your child will be better protected from risks caused by turbulence and unexpected aircraft maneuvers.

Con #1 - You have to purchase a ticket to ensure that your child can use a CRS.

Con #2 - The CRS will be an extra item that you will have to carry.

Con #3 - A CRS that is designed for cars may be difficult to properly install in a plane.

Con #4 - Juggling a CRS, a baby, and carry-on bags can be a bit of a hassle if it is just you and the baby.

For details on the last Con #4, check out the AirSafe.com article [Pros and cons of using a child seat](#).

Additional Resources

[Keeping your family safe in the air](#)
[Child travel advice from AirSafe.com](#)

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Packing for Your Trip

How you pack for your family will depend on your family's needs and on the kind of flight that you are taking. The following are some general guidelines that may give you some ideas of what you should do for your family.

Everyone (including the adults)

Assume that every time you take a trip by air, that you may be delayed and will either be stuck on a plane or in an airport far from home. Make sure that you have in your carry-on bags anything that you think you may need to survive for several hours, especially essential items such as prescription medicine. Also, review the following sections about what to pack in your checked and carry-on bags:

- * [Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)
- * [Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)
- * [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

Special Needs

Different members of your family may have different needs during the trip. Some of the basic needs include the following:

- * ***Newborns and toddlers*** - Extra diapers and enough food for at least one meal. Also, at least one extra outfit and a favorite toy or other comfort item.
- * ***Small children*** - Books, toys, homework, or other items that can entertain or distract them during a long flight or airport wait.
- * ***Preteens and teenagers*** -If your older child has handheld games, mobile phones, or other electronics, make sure that your child has packed extra batteries or battery chargers as appropriate. Your child should also have some non-electronic distractions in case of a long delay.
- * ***Grandparents and older adults*** - Make sure that they have with them any critical medical items such as prescription drugs or dietary supplements.

Luggage Issues

When it comes to packing for a trip that involves flying, you have to deal with several issues:

- * How much to pack
- * Whether to check one or more bags
- * What to keep in your carry-on bags
- * What is allowed in your bags

How much to pack

No matter where you are flying or the reason you are flying, the less you pack, the smaller the chance that you will have a problem with your bags during your trip. The following examples give you an idea of how the kinds of things that can happen with

different amounts of baggage:

* ***Use only carry-on bags*** - If all the carry-on items are small enough to fit under the seat, there will be no chance of them being checked at the last minute. Every time that you take a carry-on item that can't fit under the seat, if the overhead bins are full or close to being full, you will have to check these larger carry-ons. You should be prepared for this and pack your larger carry-ons so that they contain no valuable or irreplaceable items, or you can take the valuable items out before the bag gets checked.

* ***Checking one or more pieces of luggage*** - Checked luggage is at greater risk of being lost, damaged, or stolen compared to carry-on items. You should take steps to clearly identify your luggage, and be sure to pack them only with items that you could live without for a day or two if the bag is misplaced, or that you can replace later without too much hassle. Also make sure that you never put into your checked bags items that the airline will not pay for in the event of that item's loss or damage.

* ***Checking one or more special checked items*** - If you are checking items that are an unusual size or shape, or that are valuable or fragile, make sure that they are properly packed for shipment. If you have items that need special handling, for example firearms, make sure that you follow the airline's procedures for those items.

If you are checking anything that is out of the ordinary or that you think may need special handling, contact the airline about these items well ahead of time to see if there are any restrictions or special procedures that you have to follow.

Should you check items?

You should plan on checking items if one or more of the following are true:

- * You and your family are traveling with more carry-on sized bags than you can handle.
- * You are carrying at least one piece of luggage that is larger than the maximum allowed size or weight for a carry-on item (different airlines have different limits, so check ahead of time)
- * You are carrying an item that can only be carried in checked luggage.
- * You don't feel like dealing with your carry-on bags.

Keep in mind that whenever you check an item, you may have to pay your airline an extra fee. You may also be charged a premium for multiple items, oddly shaped items, or items that are larger or heavier than the airline's normal limits for checked luggage.

What you should keep in your carry-on bag

This issue is addressed in detail in the section [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#). The short explanation is that if you will face significant hardship, inconvenience, or cost if an item is lost, stolen, or damaged, then don't put it in a checked bag unless you have no other choice.

In addition to putting critical, valuable, or irreplaceable items in your carry-on bags, you should also keep enough clothes, toiletries, or other things that you need to survive for a

day or so if your checked bags are delayed for a significant amount of time.

What is allowed in your bag

There are a number of security regulations about what is allowed or not allowed in your checked or carry-on bag. Some items are completely banned from the plane, some items can't be placed in a carry-on bag but could be a checked item, and some items are not allowed to be brought into the secure area of an airport terminal, but can be purchased in the terminal after you pass through security. For more details, review the following sections of the book:

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

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## Dealing with Airport Security

Airports have long been attractive targets for individuals and groups bent on committing violent acts to pursue a personal, social, or political agenda, and the kind of security screening procedures that you and your family will experience at most airports are designed to keep hazardous items and dangerous people from getting on a plane.

### **Why airport security can be so frustrating**

What frustrates passengers are the procedures that are commonly used to check passengers, and the time it takes to be processed by security screeners. The procedures used by the TSA (the organization responsible for overseeing passenger screening in the US) assume that every passenger or package is a potential hazard until proven otherwise.

While the TSA makes some common sense accommodations to their procedures for children and the elderly, everyone in your family will have to deal with security screening. There are a number of things that you can do to make the screening process as smooth as possible:

\* ***Understand the process*** - The book section [The Security Screening Process](#) gives you an overview of the security process, and describes several of the common problems that passengers have with security, and how to avoid or manage those problems.

\* ***Allow enough time*** - Although it is easy to blame airport security for keeping you from boarding your plane on time, it is up to you to get your family to the gate in time. The section [Avoiding Security Delays](#) provides you with a guideline for when to show up at the airport depending on your family's travel situation.

\* ***Know what documentation you need*** - To avoid unnecessary screening delays, you should review the section [TSA Identification Requirements](#) to know what identification or other documents you and your family will need to fly.

\* ***Know what is allowed on the plane*** - To avoid the hassle of having your baggage items confiscated or being forced to leave it behind, everyone in your family should know what they can or can't take on the plane. The section [Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#) will give you details on a number of items that you and your children should leave at home, and the section [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#) describes the kind of liquid, gel, and aerosol items that are banned, and more importantly the exemptions that exist for medical related items and for food for infants and toddlers.

### **Additional Resources**

[Top 10 Security Questions](#)

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## Dealing with Unexpected Delays

The reality of flying is that sometimes you and your family will be spending an unexpected amount of time in an airplane or an airport. While sometimes you may know in advance that you will have some kind of delay, the ones that are unexpected are the ones that are most likely to cause you and your family concern or discomfort. If you plan ahead of time and take a few basic steps to prepare your family, most unexpected delays shouldn't be much of a problem.

### Kinds of delays

There are really two kinds of delays that you may encounter, a delay in getting to your final destination and situations where you spend an extra amount of time on one segment of your trip (either in an airport or on an airplane). Some examples include the following:

### Reasons for delays

There are several kinds of situations that you and your family may face that may cause you a delay in getting to your destination, or cause you to spend an unexpected amount of time in an airport or airplane:

- \* **Security screening** - This happens at your departure airport, and may be due to slow processing by the TSA (or by some other security organization), long lines, or because you or a family member gets selected for additional screening.
- \* **Delayed departure** - This can happen prior to any flight segment of your trip, and may keep you at the airport for an extra few minutes or even an extra few hours.
- \* **Ground delay** - This can happen for any number of reasons, and may happen while you are departing or arriving.
- \* **In-flight delay** - This typically happens because of either excessive arrival traffic or because weather conditions have either closed your destination airport or has limited the number of landings at your intended destination.
- \* **Diversion** - This may happen because of weather or excessive traffic at your intended destination, or because of a situation involving your aircraft.
- \* **Air turn back** - This is a diversion that takes you back to your departure airport.
- \* **Airline flight changes** - This includes a variety of situations; such as flight cancellations, the substitution of a different aircraft, or getting bumped from an oversold flight; that are due to airline actions or decisions. What these all have in common is that if it happens, you and your family will have to be rebooked on another flight.

### Immediate effects of delays

The effect that a delay will have on your family will depend on three things: the length of the delay, where you are during the delay, and whether you (or the airline) have to make changes to your travel plans. Even if you don't change your travel plans, a delay

may be an issue depending on the needs of your family members:

\* **Security delays** - This may cut down on the time you have in the terminal before boarding, and you may not be able to grab that quick meal or have that last family restroom visit that you were counting on.

\* **Delays in the airport terminal** - If the airline has not provided a specific departure time, you will have to stay in the boarding area and may only have the opportunity to get food from a store or restaurant that is close to your gate. You may also have to deal with your infant or small child's diaper and feeding needs since most airports will likely have neither diapers or food suitable for infants. You may also have to manage your older children to keep them from getting restless and bored. If the delay is for several hours, you will likely have a chance to get food, drinks, and other supplies from other parts of the airport terminal.

\* **Ground delays** - This could happen during taxi to or from the gate, or while at the gate. These delays may stretch to several hours in extreme situations, and may cause you to miss a flight connection. In extreme cases, you would have the same issues with infants and older children that you have with a delay in the terminal, except that food and drink choices will be extremely limited.

\* **Delays in the air** - These types of delays may be relatively short, and is usually a concern only if the delay results in either your family missing a flight connection, reduces or eliminates the amount of time you were expected to have at the airport before catching your next flight, or ends up turning into either an air turn back or a diversion to an alternate airport.

\* **Flight changes** - The issues are the same as you would have for delays in the airport terminal. The best case situation may be a new flight that departs at roughly the same time as your original flight. In the worst case situation, you may have to wait for a day or more for the next flight.

### **Managing unexpected delays**

This book's approach to most problems is to do one of three things: (1) avoid the possibility of a problem, (2) make unavoidable risks less likely to happen, and (3) set things up so that if the problem does happen there is a limited impact to your family. When it comes to delays, only the second and third options are possible. There are a few basic steps that you can take to make delays less likely to happen, or that will reduce their effects:

\* **General planning** - You are more likely to be delayed the more flights you take or the more times you have to change planes. If possible, choose nonstop flights. If you can't do that, choose an option where the plane has to make a stop, but you don't have to change planes. Also, avoid taking the last flight of the day where a significant delay may mean an overnight stay. Review the section [Getting the Seats that You Want](#) for more advice on planning your trip.

\* **Security delays** - For these kinds of delays, your two best options are to provide sufficient time for the screening and to reduce the chance that you are chosen for

additional screening. You can go to the sections [Avoiding Security Delays](#) for an idea of how early to arrive, and the sections [TSA Identification Requirements](#) and [The Security Screening Process](#) for tips on how to make your security screening go smoothly.

\* ***Delays in the terminal*** - Because terminals are so varied in the services and facilities that may be available, you should not assume that the terminal will have the resources that your family may need. This means that if anyone in your family has special dietary needs, then you should at least pack enough food for an extra meal. If you have an infant, you should have enough diapers, formula, or other food that will last you at least several hours. You should also have an airtight plastic bag or other container for your infant's soiled diapers and clothing. For more on taking care of your infant, review the section [Changing Diapers in the Air and on the Ground](#).

For adults and older children, you should have some kind of snack that can keep hunger under control for a while. Also, any medically necessary items such as prescription medications should be in your carry-on bags since you may not be able to get to any checked bags before you get to your destination. You can find more extensive advice on food at the airport in the section [Feeding Your Family in the Air and at the Airport](#).

\* ***Delays on the ground or in flight*** - You should prepare as you would for a delay in a terminal.

\* ***Extremely long terminal delays*** - If you are stuck at a terminal for many hours or even for an overnight stay, it may be much more comfortable for your family to leave the airport for a decent meal or to even check into a hotel for the night. Assume that your airline will not give you any money or vouchers for any of these expenses, so you should be prepared to spend the money. Be sure to check with your airline and confirm your reservation before leaving the airport. Also, make sure you get boarding passes before you leave the airport, preferably before leaving the secure area of the terminal.

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## Getting Your Child Ready to Fly

No matter how many times or how often anyone flies, traveling takes at least some preparation and planning. If you fly on a regular basis, you don't even think twice about all the things that go into a trip. Adults who are infrequent or first time fliers can easily find out what they have to know or do when they fly. For a child, getting ready to fly isn't as easy. Infants and young children have to totally depend on others when they fly, and while older children and teens may need less support, they have needs and challenges that change as they grow older.

### Preparing your infant

For an infant, you have to anticipate the issues that may come up for your child during the trip. The two most important ones deal with food and diapers. The first issue was covered in some detail in the section [Changing Diapers in the Air and on the Ground](#) and the second in [Feeding Your Family in the Air and at the Airport](#).

The other issues for infants are related to their safety and comfort in the air. The section [Using Child Restraints on Aircraft](#) discussed the pros and cons of using car seats or other approved child restraints in aircraft, and [Keeping Your Family Safe in the Air](#) discussed two issues for infants, hazards from items falling from overhead bins and steps you can take to deal with the effects of ear block, especially when the aircraft is descending for landing.

### Preparing your older children

Older children can be much more involved with a trip because they can understand what is going on and can handle some aspects of the trip on their own. However, you still have to handle other parts of the trip for them. For example, your child may want to pack his or her own bag, but you have to check out the bag to make sure that there are no restricted or banned items inside.

Another area that will need your attention is inflight entertainment. Not the entertainment provided by the airline, but what your child may want to bring on the plane. You have to make sure that what they have is appropriate for the child, can easily fit in one of your carry-on bags, and won't cause a problem in the air. Potentially messy activities like finger-painting are out, but activities with less opportunity for chaos like coloring books are in. Items or activities that make noise (or encourage your child to make noise), or that have easily lost pieces are not good inside of a plane, but things that encourage quiet and calm behavior will be appreciated by you and your fellow passengers.

### Preparing your teen or preteen

By the time your child has reached middle school and high school, he or she may think that they can handle themselves in the world with little or no help from you. A trip to the airport is a perfect opportunity to provide them with the opportunity to prove that to you and to your child. If your child is physically and emotionally mature enough to travel with little or no help from you, let your child do it. Specifically, let older or more

independent children pack their bags, go through security screening, and board the aircraft, as though they were on their own.

While it is good to give your child a bit of freedom while traveling, you should not hesitate to step in and either make suggestions or take charge. For example, if your minor child is chosen for additional security screening, you should insist on being present as well. If your child wants to take some kind of electronic device on the airplane, you may want to make sure that it is fully charged or has backup batteries before you leave home.

### **Preparing children for flying alone**

If your child is going to travel alone, or fly with other children without adult supervision, you and your child will have to do far more preparation than you would for a trip as a family, in part because most airlines have a number of rules and restrictions about travel by unaccompanied children. These issues are covered in much greater detail in the sections [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#) and [Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Problems](#)

### **Additional Resources**

[Keeping Your Family Safe at the Airport](#)

[Packing for your Trip](#)

[Dealing with Unexpected Delays](#)

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## **Acceptable Inflight Behavior**

An airplane cabin is an unusual social environment, and like many other social environments, most of the rules are unwritten and unspoken. If you and your children are aware of some of the basic rules, you and your family will have an easier time dealing with the crew and with the other passengers on the plane.

### **Alcohol**

Airplanes are a very special environment when it comes to the consumption of alcohol. Basically, any adult passenger is free to consume alcohol at any time of day, even if they are sitting next to an unrelated child. So long as the passenger is not misbehaving or obviously impaired, the flight attendants may serve that passenger throughout the flight.

If you and your family have strongly held beliefs about the consumption of alcohol and you normally don't expose your children to situations where people are drinking, then you should prepare your family for what they may see on the plane.

While passengers are free to drink, they are not free to disturb other passengers. If you see a passenger who is drinking and is doing things that are disturbing or potentially violent, don't confront the passenger, but instead bring the situation to the attention of a flight attendant.

### **Privacy of other passengers**

The inside of an airplane is a crowded public space where passengers have very little personal privacy, but so long as they are not disturbing other passengers, they are free to do the kinds of things they would do in a typical public space. What this means in practical terms is that so long as a passenger is sitting in their seat and not violating an FAA regulation, breaking the law, making noise, or otherwise causing a disturbance, they can do almost whatever they please.

While there are no FAA regulations on what a passenger can read or watch, flight attendants have the authority to intervene if necessary. For example, if someone is viewing material that is inappropriate for children, and that person is making no attempt at keeping it out of sight of your child, you could ask the passenger to not make the material so visible. If this does not work, you could ask the flight attendant to intervene.

### **Noise in the cabin**

When you fly, you will hear variety of noises in the cabin that no one can escape, from the mechanical sounds associated with the airplane to announcements over the public address system, to passengers and flight attendants talking. There are already plenty of noises on the airplane, so the general rule is the less extra noise the better.

This doesn't mean that your children can't talk or enjoy themselves, but when talking, they should be encouraged to use their "inside voice." If they have any kind of electronic device, it should either have the sound turned off, or your child should use headphones. If the device doesn't have a headphone jack and if the audio can't be

turned off, then don't use the device on a plane.

### **Behavior toward flight attendants**

Flight attendants have a variety of duties, including ensuring passenger safety and comfort. They are especially busy at the beginning of the flight during boarding, and again as the aircraft is descending for landing. If it is a flight with meal or beverage service, they will also be busy if they are maneuvering serving carts up and down the aisle. While it is appropriate for you or your child to ask questions or make requests of the flight attendant at any time during the flight, you will most likely get a quick response if they are not busy with something else. You should also encourage your child to think about what he or she wants to ask the flight attendant and to be very clear about questions or requests that he or she may have.

If anyone in your family has any special needs, and you think the flight attendants may help, contact one of them during boarding to discuss your situation. If your child is flying alone, either your child or someone escorting the child to the gate should make sure that someone from the cabin crew is aware that an unaccompanied child is on board.

### **Behavior toward other passengers**

In general, your child should leave other passengers alone, and other passengers should leave your child alone, especially if your child is traveling as an unaccompanied minor. While there are passengers who enjoy interacting with other passengers, most are likely to only want to be undisturbed during the flight.

Behavior that may be disturbing to nearby passengers include moving the seatback repeatedly, turning lights on and off, playing in the aisles, and making loud noises. A child who has to stay in a seat for several hours on a long flight may need to work off a bit of pent-up energy, but as a parent, you have to figure out ways to deal with your child's needs in a way that does not disturb other passengers.

When your child is flying with you, you can take the lead on dealing with any requests from other passengers. If your child is flying alone or sitting in a different part of the plane, you should encourage your child to comply with a reasonable suggestion such as cutting off a light that your child isn't using. On the other hand, if the request isn't reasonable or it makes your child uncomfortable, encourage your child to either politely decline the request and if necessary to contact a flight attendant.

### **Using electronic devices on the plane**

If you or someone in your family wants to use a personal electronic device like a smartphone or ebook, that device should be used responsibly. In addition to following the noise guidelines given earlier in this section, anyone who uses an electronic device on a plane should be aware of the general guidelines most airlines follow concerning the kinds of devices you can use, and when they can be used during the flight. Many of these general guidelines are discussed in the section [Using Electronic Devices on the Plane](#).

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Preparing Your Child to Fly Alone

If your child is going to travel alone, you and your child may have to do far more preparation than you would for a trip as a family. Depending on the airline, a younger child may only be allowed to fly under that airline's program for unaccompanied children. Older children may not be eligible for such programs, which means if they have to fly alone, they will have to handle problems like flight cancellations, lost bags, and security screening on their own. If you and your child take the time to properly prepare for a solo flight, you can reduce many of the risks, and hopefully much of your stress.

What is an unaccompanied child?

In the US, each airline has its own definition on who is considered to be an unaccompanied child, and its own rules for unaccompanied child travel. The rules vary by airline, but in general an airline's unaccompanied child program is for a minor traveling alone who is in a certain age range (typically from age five to 12).

Can your child fly alone?

Airlines have detailed rules about whether a child can fly alone, including restrictions related to the age of the child, when the child is flying, and your child's final destination. The section [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#) goes into great detail about this, and describes the most common general rules and restrictions for unaccompanied children.

Should your child fly alone?

Most parents would rather have someone fly with their child, especially a child who isn't mature enough to use public transit alone. If you have a choice, you should have a responsible adult to travel with your child. However, there are many situations where you may not have that option. It is less of a concern for older children and teenagers, but no matter what the age of the child, when a child flies alone, the parent or other person responsible for the child should take extra steps to make the trip a successful one.

Should you use an airline's unaccompanied child program?

Each airline has three kinds of age restrictions for unaccompanied children, a minimum age for an unaccompanied child, an age range where you are required to use their unaccompanied child program, and another age range where the program is available, but not required. You should check with your particular airline to find out their age restrictions.

How to reduce unaccompanied child travel risks

When your child is traveling unaccompanied, you would typically have a responsible adult drop off your child at the departure airport and another responsible adult at the destination airport. This means that if something happens at the beginning or end of the trip, your child will have someone they know and trust who can help resolve any problem. For the rest of the trip, it will be up to either your child or the airline to solve

any problem.

There is quite a bit that you can do to manage risks by avoiding potential problems entirely, taking steps to reduce the effects of those problems, or managing problems should they occur. The section [Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Problems](#) goes into much greater detail about issues your child may face when traveling alone, and things that you and your child can do about those potential problems.

Additional Resources

[Keeping Your Family Safe at the Airport](#)

[Packing for your Trip](#)

[Dealing with Unexpected Delays](#)

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Avoiding Common Air Travel Problems

There are many kinds of air travel problems. Some, like a weather delay that leads to a missed connection, are beyond the control of the passenger or the airline. However, many travel problems can be avoided if the passenger takes steps to prevent a problem from happening in the first place.

Avoidable problems

Many potential problem areas are ones where your decisions or actions can completely avoid a problem, or greatly reduce the chance that you have a problem. The following areas are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this book:

General Baggage Issues

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

Checked Baggage

Knowing what kinds of valuables should not be placed in checked baggage can keep you from having unreimbursed expenses should your luggage be lost or damaged.

Review the following sections for advice on checked baggage:

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Reducing Checked Luggage Problems](#)

[Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips](#)

Carry-on Baggage

Understanding your airline's limitation on baggage size can keep you from having your bags checked at the gate, sparing you the risk of lost, delayed, or damaged checked bags. Also, there are a variety of things that you should always keep on your person or in your carry-on bags because you may need to use them in flight, or because of the inconvenience of having them lost, delayed, or destroyed. Review the following sections for carry-on baggage advice:

[Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice](#)

[Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

Banned and restricted baggage items

If you attempt to bring a banned or restricted item into the terminal or in a checked bag, you run the risk of at the very least having the item confiscated, and possibly a fine or other penalty. If you review the following sections, you will understand the basics of what you and your family should not pack:

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

Security Delays

The two most common reasons for security delays are the discovery of banned or restricted items during security screening, and having improper travel documentation. The previous paragraph has links to sections covering banned and restricted items. The following book sections discuss other common causes of security delays:

[The Security Screening Process](#)

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[Avoiding Security Delays](#)

Unaccompanied Child Travel Issues

Taking the time to understand the details of the airline's rules can keep you from getting surprised by unexpected charges or unacceptable airline policies. For example, if a child is stranded at an airport overnight, the airline's policy may be to turn the child over to the local child protection service agency for the night. The following sections discuss many of the key issues that may come up when your child travels alone:

[Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Problems](#)

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The Security Screening Process

The basic screening process at US airports is similar to what you would find in most airports around the world. Most security screening locations will have a walk-through metal detector and an x-ray scanner for carry-on bags, shoes, and other items. The following is also true for most screening locations in the US:

- * Only ticketed passengers or other authorized airport workers or visitors are allowed beyond the security checkpoints.
- * If you have a laptop or other large electronic item like a video game console, you will have to take it out of any carry-on bag and have it screened separately.
- * Smaller electronic items, such as cell phones and iPods, may be subjected to additional screening.
- * If you are carrying gifts, keep them unwrapped so security screeners can inspect the contents of the box or package.
- * You should remove as much metal from your pockets and your body as you can. Security screeners have to identify any metal that is detected at the checkpoint. If you set off the alarm, you will undergo additional screening that may include use of a hand-held metal detector and a pat-down search.
- * While no longer common outside the US, most travelers at US airports are required to remove their shoes for x-ray screening before entering the walk-through metal detector. Current TSA practices allow children 12 and younger and adults 75 and older to keep their shoes on during the screening process. If the passenger triggers an alarm, the passenger may have to remove their shoes before going through additional screening.
- * If you set off the metal detectors or if the screeners see something suspicious in the x-ray machine, you may be asked to go to a separate area for additional screening.
- * If you try to take prohibited items through the screening checkpoint, you may not be allowed to proceed into the secure area unless you either dispose of that item or place that item in your checked luggage.

Below is a brief outline of the key problems that can happen, and the steps you and your family can take to deal with them.

Problem 1: You don't have an acceptable form of identification

If you don't have an acceptable ID, the TSA will likely take extra time to confirm your identity. The worst case scenario is that TSA is unable to confirm your identity and you are not allowed to board your flight.

You can avoid this problem entirely by making sure you have the appropriate identification. If you review the book section [TSA Identification Requirements](#), you will see exactly what kind of identification is acceptable, and what alternative forms of

identification the TSA can use to identify you if you don't have an acceptable ID.

If you have any doubts about whether your ID will be accepted by the TSA, have some alternative forms of ID ready just in case you need them.

Problem 2: Your travel documents are not in order

In order to go through security, you need to have an ID and a valid boarding pass.

Typical boarding pass problems include not having a boarding pass, names on your ID and the boarding pass don't match, or accidentally using the wrong boarding pass.

Before you go to the airport, check to see that the names match, and that the pass is for the correct airline, airport, and date.

Before you get to the security line, make sure you have your boarding pass with you. If you forgot it at home, you can get another one printed at the baggage check in counter, or at an ATM-like machine that prints your boarding pass (if your airline has one at the airport).

If the names on the ID and the boarding pass don't match, either use an acceptable ID that matches what is on your boarding pass, or ask the airline to make the name on your boarding pass match the name on your ID. Sometimes the airline's boarding pass printing system does odd things to the name on the boarding pass, and if this is the case, it will usually not be an issue with the TSA.

Problem 3: Your carry-on items are subjected to extra screening

If you or one of your carry-on bags raises suspicion, or an alarm on a screening device goes off, either you or the bag may be subject to additional screening. If you take the basic steps outlined below, it will be less likely that you will face delays due to additional screening:

* ***Check every bag for banned or restricted items*** - There are a number of items that you are not allowed to carry through security. Some, like realistic toy weapons, are not allowed in the terminal at all, and many others may be allowed under some conditions. For more complete details on what you should not carry through security, review the book sections [Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#) and [Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#). If you have a banned or restricted item, you may not be allowed to board your aircraft unless you either dispose of that item, place that item in your checked luggage, or make other arrangements for that item.

Another set of common trouble areas for passengers are liquids, gels, and aerosols in their carry-on bags. The book section [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#) goes into much greater detail into how they should be carried, what items are allowed, and what exceptions exist.

* ***Completely empty any bag your child will use*** - If your child will be traveling with a backpack or some other kind of bag that he or she uses regularly, completely empty that bag before you pack it for your trip. This gives you and your child an opportunity to clear out items that may be on the TSA's list of restricted or banned items, and to figure out what's really needed for the trip and what can stay at home.

* ***Know what carry-on items should be taken out*** - The TSA requires that certain

items like larger laptop computers have to be taken out of your carry-on bag for separate screening (TSA typically provides plastic bins for you to place your removed items). If the TSA sees something suspicious in your carry-on bag, the TSA will inspect the bag, ask you about the contents of the bag, and possibly run it through the x-ray scanner a second time.

While larger electronic items like full sized laptops have to be taken out, smaller electronic items like mobile phones, Kindles, iPads, device chargers, and handheld electronic games can be kept in your backpack or carry-on bag.

* ***Keep gifts unwrapped*** - If you are carrying gifts, keep them unwrapped so security screeners can inspect the contents of the box or package.

Problem 4: You have to go through additional screening

A common way that you can get chosen for this kind of screening is when you forget items like coins or a mobile phone in your pocket, or if you forget to remove metal items like a belt with a metal belt buckle. Your additional screening may be as simple as removing the offending items and walking through the detection device again, or as invasive as being subjected to a pat-down search.

One guaranteed way to get a pat-down search is to refuse to use the standard passenger screening device like a metal detector or a full-body scanners. You may not be able to refuse these more personal searches, but if you have any concerns about it, for example a desire for more privacy, make your concerns known either to a security staff member or the TSA supervisor.

If you are holding a small child and are asked to submit to additional screening, you will be allowed to stay with your child. If you believe that you or your child are not being treated fairly or in a professional manner, ask to speak to the supervisor on duty.

If you heed the following advice, you will reduce the chance that you have to go through additional personal screening:

* ***Remove as much metal as possible*** - You should remove as much metal from your pockets and your body as you can. Security screeners have to identify any metal that is detected at the checkpoint. If you set off the alarm, you will undergo additional screening that may include use of a hand-held metal detector or a pat-down search.

* ***Answer all questions honestly*** - If a screener asks you about something in your bag, in your pockets, or on your person, tell the truth. If the truth may embarrass you, don't answer so loudly that others can hear you. If your child is being questioned, don't hesitate to get involved and to ask for a supervisor if you think the screener isn't behaving in a professional manner. If you or your child did something wrong, like accidentally bringing a prohibited item through security, then simply admit it. Unless it is a dangerous item like a weapon, the worse that will happen is that the item may be confiscated or you may be forced to throw it away.

* ***Give the security screeners a heads-up*** - If you know that you will cause an alarm to go off, for example because you or your child have a metallic medical implant, or a large metal button or fastener on your clothes, tell the security staff ahead of time so they can have a chance to make your screening as low-key as possible.

** Note on head coverings and loose clothing* - All members of the traveling public are permitted to wear head coverings (whether religious or not) through security checkpoints. You may be subjected to additional screening if your headwear or clothing (religious or otherwise) is loose fitting or large enough to hide prohibited items. If any security concern cannot be resolved through a pat-down search, you may be offered the opportunity to remove the head covering in a private screening area.

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TSA Identification Requirements

Before you can board a plane at a US airport, you have to have identification that meets TSA requirements. For domestic US travel, an unexpired passport (from any country) or other government-issued photo ID (from a number of national, state, or local entities in the US) is required for travelers age 18 and over. This ID must contain the following: name, date of birth, gender, expiration date and a tamper-resistant feature in order for a passenger to be allowed to go through the checkpoint.

While children under the age of 18 who are traveling on domestic flights are not required to have an approved ID, it is a good idea for a child to use one if he or she has one. For international travel, children, even infants, have to meet the same identification requirements as adults, typically a valid passport.

Acceptable forms of ID for domestic US flights

The TSA and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has an extensive list of acceptable ID for flights between domestic US airports, including common forms of identification such as a drivers license or a state-issued ID card:

- * US passport
- * US passport card
- * DHS "Trusted Traveler" cards (NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST)
- * US Military ID (active duty, retired, dependents, and DOD civilians)
- * Permanent Resident Card (for non-US citizens residing in the US)
- * Border Crossing Card
- * DHS-designated enhanced drivers license
- * Drivers Licenses or other state photo identity cards issued by a state department of motor vehicles (or equivalent organization)
- * Native American Tribal Photo ID
- * Airline or airport-issued ID (if issued under a TSA-approved security plan)
- * Passport issued by a national government
- * Canadian provincial drivers license or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) card
- * Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC)

Citizens of countries other than the US or Canada are not required to carry their passports if they have documents issued by the US government such as Permanent Resident Cards. Those who do not should use their passports.

The rules for children under the age of 18 who are citizens of another country are the same for children who are US citizens in that they are not required to have an ID for a domestic flight, and must have a passport for international travel to or from the US. Realistically, older teenagers may be asked for ID, and if they don't have some kind of identification, even an ID that is not on the TSA list of accepted IDs, the child may be delayed by security personnel while they confirm his or her identity.

Unacceptable forms of ID

Examples of types of ID, even if they are photo IDs, that are not accepted include the following:

- * Employee badge
- * School or university ID card
- * Credit or debit card
- * Library card

What if you don't have an acceptable ID?

You may still be allowed to fly if you don't have an acceptable ID, though you should allow extra time for the TSA to use an alternative method of identification. Bring any ID or documents you may have (including expired valid photo IDs, or the documents listed in the previous paragraph) to assist in verification of identity.

Passengers need at least two alternate forms of identification, such as a social security card, birth certificate, marriage license, or credit card. The documents must bear the name of the passenger. Also, one of these documents must bear identification information containing one of the following: date of birth, gender, address, or photo. If the TSA can confirm your identity, you may be allowed to enter the secured part of the airport terminal area, but you may be subject to additional screening.

International travel

In most cases, international travelers of any age will need to have a valid passport, and depending on the country being visited, a valid visa or other entry document. Some countries, including the US and Canada, may have agreements that allow travelers from selected countries to use passport alternatives when entering the country.

Check with your airline or with the appropriate government offices to find out the identification and visa requirements for the countries you plan to visit. Many countries require that your passport be valid for at least six months after you enter the country. If you plan to stay in a country beyond your passport's expiration date, you should get a new passport before you travel.

Tickets and boarding passes

In the US, to enter the secure area of the airport, most passengers will have to have both an acceptable form of identification and either a ticket or a boarding pass. Many travelers use electronic tickets, and those travelers will have to have a boarding pass before entering the security checkpoint. In many cases, if you don't have any checked baggage, you can print out your boarding pass before getting to the airport or at a special kiosk at the airport. If you have checked bags, you can get your boarding pass when you check your bags at the check-in counter.

Costs related to travel document problems

If you miss a flight or have any extra travel costs because of a problem with your travel documents, you may complain to the airline or to the TSA, but it is unlikely that you would be compensated for any losses. It is the passengers' responsibility to make sure that their travel documents are in order before they fly. For example, if you miss a flight because you had to take extra time to go through security because the TSA needed to

check your alternative IDs, neither the TSA nor the airline would owe you anything for any extra costs.

If your travel documents were not in order, and the airline did not allow you to board an international flight, you are responsible for any costs that you incur. Also, if you travel overseas and are not allowed to enter your destination country, the airline is obligated to fly you back to your departure airport, but you would be responsible for paying for any costs associated with that return ticket.

Additional Information

[Top 10 Security Questions](#)

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Avoiding Security Delays

The most unpredictable part of the airport experience is the amount of time it will take you to go through security, especially the TSA process at US airports. It may be as short as a few minutes or it could take over 45 minutes. While there is no guaranteed way to avoid all excessive delays caused by the TSA, there is plenty that you and your family can do to make it much less likely that you will be late for your flight.

Risks management of screening delays

Two of the three general approaches mentioned in the [Risk Management Basics](#) section will work when it comes to avoiding security screening delays. The first approach, avoiding the problem if you can, won't work because security screening is mandatory. Your family can easily employ the other two approaches of making delays less likely to happen, and setting things up so that delays have a limited impact on your family's trip.

Making screening delays less likely to happen

In the typical screening process, the TSA has to complete four tasks for each passenger, and three of them can cause a delay during your screening process:

- 1. Verifying passenger identification and travel documents** - Delays happen here if you or your family members don't have acceptable identification or if other travel documents such as your boarding pass are not in order. For details on what documents are acceptable, visit the section [TSA Identification Requirements](#).
- 2. Screening carry-on luggage** - Problems happen with this part of the screening process if you or your family are carrying an item that is banned or restricted, or if you make it hard for the security staff to easily screen your carry-on baggage. The section [The Security Screening Process](#) has advice on what you can do to find and remove banned and restricted items from your bags before you get to the airport. Review the sections [Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#) and [Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#) to see what you should not have in your carry-on bags.
- 3. Screening passengers:** The section [The Security Screening Process](#) describes how something as simple as forgetting to take coins out of your pocket can lead to extra screening, and also has suggestions for how to respond if you or your child has to submit to additional screening.
- 4. Screening checked luggage** - Because checked luggage goes through a different security process than passengers and carry-on bags, you may not be aware of a problem with your checked bag until your flight is over. Even if there is a problem with your checked bag, it is unlikely that it will cause delay problems for you, your family, or your carry-on bags as you go through security screening.

Limiting the impact of screening delays

The most obvious way to limit the impact of screening delays is to have enough extra time so that if a screening delay does happen, you will have enough time left to catch your flight. The typical domestic airline flight starts boarding about 30 minutes before

scheduled departure. A reasonable time to deal with security (waiting in line plus the actual screening) is about 45 minutes. Add a few minutes for walking to your departure gate, and that adds up to about 90 minutes. In other words, plan on getting to the end of the security line at least 90 minutes before your scheduled departure.

When you should get to the airport

Airlines and sometimes airports provide regularly updated estimates of the time it will take to go through security at a particular airport. The sensible thing to do is to contact the airline's or airport's web site, and follow their suggested arrival time.

AirSafe.com suggests that you get to the security line at least 90 minutes before departure, but only if all of the following are true for your family:

- * You are on a domestic flight.
- * Everyone has only carry-on bags.
- * Everyone in your family has an ID that is acceptable to the TSA (children under 18 are not required to have an ID for domestic flights).
- * All of the children in your family who look like they could be at least 18 also has a TSA-approved ID.
- * Everyone's boarding pass was printed before you arrived at the airport (if you did not buy a seat for a lap child, a boarding pass is not required).
- * You are getting dropped off right in front of the terminal.

If any of the situations listed below are true for you, your family should arrive earlier (up to a maximum of three hours before departure):

Checking one or more bags - Add 30 minutes.

Not getting dropped off in front of the terminal - Add 15 minutes.

Checking one or more special items - Add 45 minutes (for example, sports equipment, oversized checked bags, pets).

Did not preprint your boarding passes - Add 30 minutes.

Need to go to the check in counter or airline customer service for any reason - Add 30 minutes.

International flight - Add 60 minutes.

Traveling with more than one small child - Add 15 minutes.

Traveling as a family group for the first time - Add 15 minutes.

Traveling with multiple families or with a large group - Add 30 minutes.

If you have more than one complicating issue, you should add them up (to a maximum

of three hours). For example, if you are on an international flight (60 minutes) with more than one small child (15 minutes), and you are traveling with checked bags (30 minutes), adding all these times to the baseline of 90 minutes gives you 195 minutes. This is more than three hours, so you should get to the airport three hours before departure.

Regardless of AirSafe.com's suggested arrival times, it is always better to arrive too early than too late, so use your best judgment as well as these guidelines to make your arrival decision.

Additional Resources

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[The Security Screening Process](#)

[Top 10 Security Questions](#)

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Top 10 Security Questions

1. What kind of identification do I need to fly?

In the US, there are several kinds of acceptable identification that you can use (review the [TSA Identification Requirements](#) section of this book for details). When you buy your ticket, you have to provide your name, gender, and date of birth to the airline, and that information must match the information on your approved ID. When you get to the airport, you have to provide the TSA with your boarding pass, as well as an approved ID if you are over 18. For international trips, every passenger, even infants, must have a passport.

2. Can I fly without approved identification?

Yes, but only under certain conditions. For domestic US flights, children under the age of 18 can fly without a TSA approved ID. All adult passengers (age 18 and over) are required to show a valid US federal or state-issued photo ID that contains their name, date of birth, gender, and an expiration date. A complete list of approved IDs is in the [TSA Identification Requirements](#) section.

3. What do I do if I don't have an approved ID?

If you have never acquired an approved ID, or if your ID is expired or missing, you do have some options if you are taking a domestic flight. The TSA will allow you to go through security if they can positively identify you with alternative identification documents. The TSA will need at least two alternate forms of identification, such as a social security card, birth certificate, marriage license, or credit card. The documents must include your name. Also, at least one of your documents must contain at least one of the following: your date of birth, gender, address, or photo. If the TSA can confirm your identity, you may enter the secured area, but you could be subject to additional screening. If you are on an international flight but don't have your passport or visa, even if you can get past the TSA, you may have trouble leaving the US or entering your destination country.

4. What kind of travel documents does a child need?

For domestic US flights, children from age two to 17 only need a boarding pass. Children under the age of two who are traveling as a lap child will require a boarding verification document from the airline, but would not need either a boarding pass or an ID. If you are traveling with a child under two and have purchased a ticket so that your child can occupy a seat, your child will need to have a boarding pass. For international travel, children of all ages will have to have a passport in addition to a boarding pass or boarding verification document.

5. Should unaccompanied children fly with an ID?

For international flights, children will need a passport regardless of their age. Although it is not required for domestic flights, if your child happens to have some kind of ID, even if it is not on the TSA list of approved IDs, your child should carry it.

6. Are the TSA screening machines safe?

The TSA uses several different kinds of screening technology for people and baggage. For carry-on items and checked luggage, the TSA uses x-ray machines that may damage very sensitive camera film, but otherwise has no lasting effects on your belongings. For screening people, the two most common devices are metal detectors, which give off electromagnetic radiation, and full-body explosives detection scanners.

The scanners use one of two technologies, one based on x-rays and the other based on high frequency radio waves. While the TSA claims that the level of radiation used is very low, and that these devices are safe, the TSA does not claim that the devices pose no risk. Any kind of radiation exposure carries some risk, but it is unclear if that risk will result in any long-term negative health effects such as cancer.

7. Do I have to use the full-body scanner?

The full-body scanners, which produce an image that shows if a passenger is concealing explosives, weapons, or other dangerous items, are frequently used by the TSA in the US. If you don't want to be screened using that device, you will have to allow the TSA to perform a pat-down search before you are allowed to enter the secure area of the airport.

8. Why does the TSA have to do pat-down searches?

The TSA uses a variety of methods to prevent hazardous and prohibited items from getting onto aircraft, and physical searches are one of those methods. Pat-down searches may be used if a passenger triggers an alarm on one of the metal detectors or full-body scanners, or if a passenger does not want to use the full-body scanner.

9. What if the name on my boarding pass does not exactly match the name on my ID?

If there is only a small difference between your boarding pass and ID, for example a missing middle initial, you should not have a problem. There might also be small differences caused by the boarding pass printing practices of individual airlines. If the TSA can't confirm your identity, you may not be allowed to get on your plane.

10. How do I check if I am on the no-fly list?

The TSA uses a number of databases and watch lists to prevent selected individuals from boarding an airliner, or to identify individuals for additional screening. You can't check to see if you are on one of these lists. You will not know if you are on one of these lists until either your airline or the TSA tells you. If you are on the no-fly list, you will likely not be allowed to get on your aircraft. If you are on one of the other watch lists, you may be delayed because of additional screening. If you are on one of these watch lists because of a mistake, for example because you have a similar name to someone in the database, you may have to contact the US Department of Homeland Security to resolve this problem.

Additional resources

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

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## **Basic Baggage and Security Advice**

Most passengers fly with at least one piece of carry-on baggage, and many have to check one or more pieces of luggage as well. It is not possible to avoid all baggage-related and security-related problems that you and your family could face, but there are many ways to either avoid the problem altogether, reduce the negative impact of problems should they occur, or give yourself the best chance of a positive outcome if a problem happens.

No matter what precautions you take, there is always the risk of having items lost, misplaced, stolen, or damaged, many of the common risks can be reduced, avoided, or eliminated with a little bit of planning. The following pieces of advice provide some examples of how to deal with many of the more common baggage related issues.

### **General baggage advice**

There are only a few things to always avoid when it comes to either carry-on bags or checked luggage. There are the obvious items that you should never pack such as illegal drugs or explosive devices (including firecrackers). However, there are many other things that you and your family should consider if you want to make sure that you are packing the items that you need for your trip, and that you avoid the most common types of baggage problems. The following book sections should give you an idea of what you can't pack and whether you should place an item in a checked or a carry-on bag:

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

### **Baggage limits**

In general, airlines allow you to bring without additional charge up to two pieces of carry-on baggage (one of which can fit under your seat), plus some additional items such as umbrellas, and baby strollers. Additional baggage may cost you extra. However, every ticketed passenger, even a toddler, gets the same free baggage allowance, so with a bit of planning you can avoid checking bags.

There is no limit to the number of bags you and your family can take on a trip, but if you have to check bags, most airlines typically charge you for each checked bag, with additional charges if you have multiple bags or larger checked items. Because each airline has its own baggage rules, you should contact your airline to find out its specific baggage policies and prices.

### **Identify your baggage**

You should clearly identify all of your baggage, both checked and carry-on bags. Identification should include your contact information on both the outside and inside of each bag. You should also put some kind of personalized identification on the outside like a ribbon or sticker to make it easier to spot in the baggage claim area. You should

also do the same for any carry-on bag that is too big to fit under the seat, since in some cases your larger carry-on bag may be checked if there is no room in the overhead bins.

The book section [Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips](#) has more suggestions on steps you can take to make sure that you can easily find your checked bag at the end of a trip. The section [Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#) gives you advice on what to do if things go badly for your family's checked bags.

### **Know what you are carrying**

Watch your bags while you are at the airport and don't accept packages from strangers. Be prepared to answer questions about who packed your bags and whether you might have left them unattended at any time. Think carefully and answer any questions honestly. If you have any doubts about what's in your bag or who may have packed the bag, say so.

### **Expect to have your bags searched**

Both carry-on and checked bags are subject to being hand-searched, especially when airline security personnel cannot determine the contents of a package. Leave gifts unwrapped until after you arrive at your destination. Airline security personnel will open any gift if they are unable to identify the contents using an x-ray scanner. For more details on what happens to you and your family during security screening, review the section [The Security Screening Process](#).

### **Allow extra time for special circumstances**

During busy periods, or when traveling with young children or infants, or with elderly or disabled passengers, arrive earlier than you usually would. For a guide to how much time to allow for security screening, check out the section [Avoiding Security Delays](#).

### **Keep your photo identification handy**

If you don't have a photo ID, make sure you have two pieces of identification, one of which must be issued by a government authority. The TSA does not require that minors aged 17 and younger have a government-issued photo identification for domestic US flights, though all passengers should have a passport if traveling internationally. Failure to have proper identification may result in additional security scrutiny. Some airlines may prohibit you from boarding without proper ID. For details on what kinds of IDs are acceptable, review the section [TSA Identification Requirements](#).

### **Additional Information**

[Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice](#)

[Reducing Checked Luggage Problems](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

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## Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice

A reasonable approach to carry-on baggage is to keep in mind three things when you pack: think small, think smart, and think safe. If you follow these ideas, you will likely have fewer problems with your carry-ons.

### Think small

- \* The maximum size carry-on bag for most airlines is 45 linear inches (the total of the height, width, and depth of the bag). Anything larger should be checked.
- \* No oversize packages or large pieces of luggage can be carried in the overhead bins.
- \* Important, hard to replace, and valuable items like prescription drugs, personal electronics, jewelry, and important documents, should always be in your carry-on bags. For more advice along these lines, review the section [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#).
- \* If you only have carry-on bags, you will avoid the [common airline baggage fees](#) charged by most airlines.

### Think smart

- \* If you plan to check one or more bags, put heavier and less valuable items in your checked bag, and keep your carry-on as light as possible.
- \* Make sure that you don't have any restricted or banned items in your carry-on. For more on what you should keep out of your carry-ons, review the sections [Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#) and [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#).
- \* Before packing, check with your airline's carry-on guidelines. Typically, you are allowed to bring a carry-on bag that can fit in the overhead bin, another that can fit under the seat, and additional items like a coat, cane, or umbrella.
- \* In certain situations, the airline may require larger carry-on bags to be checked, so be prepared to place all your valuable or necessary items in something small enough to fit under the seat (like a large purse or small backpack).
- \* Put contact information both inside and outside any larger carry-on item in case the airline has to check it at the last minute.

### Think safe

- \* Beware of carry-on items that may fall from overhead bins during the flight, a hazard described in detail in the section [Keeping Your Family Safe in the Air](#).
- \* If possible, stow heavier items under the seat in front of you, not overhead.
- \* Don't crowd or stuff items into the overhead storage bin.
- \* If an emergency evacuation is necessary, leave your carry-on items on the plane.

\* Remember, be safety conscious when stowing your carry-on items, or when opening an overhead bin either in flight or after landing.

**Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

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## Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks

If you are traveling with carry-on baggage, even if it is just a small bag or purse, there are a few things you should do to avoid most of the problems you may face during security screening, in the terminal, or in the plane:

\* ***Prepare to have your bags searched*** - Before you get to the airplane, you have to go through airport security, and that means putting your carry-on baggage through the x-ray machine, and having your bags opened up and inspected by airport security. For more on the basic airline security process, refer to the book section [The Security Screening Process](#).

\* ***Know what's allowed in the cabin*** - There are many rules about what is allowed in your carry-on baggage. Before you fly, you should review the sections [Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#) and [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#), as well as any additional restrictions your particular airline may have.

\* ***Keep track of your bags*** - In the terminal, especially in the areas beyond the security screening checkpoints, unattended baggage may be a target for thieves, and may be confiscated or even destroyed by airport security.

\* ***Prepare to have your carry-on checked*** - If your airplane runs out of room in the overhead storage compartment, your airline may check your bag at the last minute. Keep critical items like medicine and eyeglasses and valuable items like jewelry and cash in a separate bag or pouch that is small enough to fit under an airline seat. If you are forced to check your carry-on, take out this smaller bag and keep it with you.

The section [The Security Screening Process](#) covers the general security screening process for passengers and baggage, and the section [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#) discusses what kinds of items are best kept on your person or in your carry-on bag.

\* ***Don't overpack your bag*** - Make sure your carry-on bag is light enough for you or someone else to easily lift and put in the overhead bin.

\* ***Beware of overhead bin hazards*** - If someone puts a heavy bag or item in the overhead bin that is above your head, or if the bin is hard to close, you should ask a flight attendant to check the security of the overhead bin. The section [Keeping Your Family Safe in the Air](#) has more insights into the danger you and your family faces from baggage in the overhead bins.

### Additional Information

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice](#)

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## Reducing Checked Luggage Problems

Any time that you fly with checked luggage, you run the risk of having your bag damaged, stolen, lost, or delayed. Your choices for dealing with this problem include reducing the chance that it happens at all, taking steps to keep lost, delayed, or damaged baggage from ruining your trip, or being ready to deal with a checked bag problem if one occurs.

### Reducing or eliminating checked luggage risks

While you may not be able to avoid problems with your checked bag, there are several things that you can do to eliminate the risk, or at least reduce the chance that you have a checked bag problem:

- \* ***Use only carry-on bags*** - Not having checked luggage means no chance of a checked bag problem.
- \* ***Travel with as few checked bags as possible*** - Your chance of a problem goes up with every additional bag. Also, airlines with checked bag fees may charge a premium if you have more than one checked bag.
- \* ***Make your checked bags easy to inspect*** - In the US, the TSA has to be able to inspect a checked bag, so your bag should remain unlocked (with some exceptions such as firearms which must be placed in an appropriate locked container after inspection), or that you use a TSA-approved lock. If your checked bag is improperly locked, the bag or its contents may be damaged during a security inspection.
- \* ***Make sure that your checked bag is within airline limits*** - Airlines have size and dimension limits for checked bags, and bags outside of these limits may be delayed, or the airline may refuse to allow it to be checked.
- \* ***Make sure that your checked items are properly packaged*** - Sports items such as golf clubs or skis, or other checked items that are not standard luggage items should be packed appropriately to prevent damage from normal handling.
- \* ***Make sure that your airline properly tags your bag*** - At check in, make sure that the numbers on the tag the gate agent attaches to each piece of checked luggage matches the numbers on your baggage claim tickets. Also, ensure that you and your bag are going to the same destination airport.
- \* ***Put contact information on the outside and the inside of each checked bag*** - This makes it easier for the airline to reunite you with your bag if it is delayed.
- \* ***Make your bag easy to identify*** - To avoid taking the wrong bag from the baggage claim area (or having someone take your bag by mistake), make your bag easy to identify. Some easy things to do include attaching colored ribbons or stickers to the bag.
- \* ***Check your bags after arrival*** - Go through your checked luggage after arrival to see if anything is damaged or missing, or if extra items were placed in the bag. If there is a problem, make sure you contact your airline as soon as possible. When you get your bag at your destination, make sure that the number or other identifying

information on your claim ticket matches the information on your bag.

### **Keeping checked luggage problems from ruining your trip**

Having a checked bag lost, delayed, or damaged is something no one wants to experience, but knowing that this may happen, you can certainly take steps to keep a bag problem from causing a major disruption to your trip:

\* ***Don't put valuables in a checked bag*** - There are two kinds of valuables, those that have a value that could be measured in financial terms, and those that don't. You should not put these kinds of items in a checked bag if the airline is not required to fully compensate you for a damaged or lost item. You should also keep an item out of checked baggage if no amount of financial compensation could make up for the loss or damage of that item.

Financially valuable items that should be kept out of checked bags include things like cash, cameras, and computers. Items that have a value that can't be measured in money include a favorite toy or the information stored on a computer.

Review the section [Things You Should Never Put In Checked Baggage](#) for more details on what you should keep out of your checked bag.

\* ***Don't put hard to replace items in a checked bag*** - If an item will cause you excessive amounts of inconvenience if it is lost, stolen, or damaged, then don't put it in a checked bag unless you have no other choice. This would include items like mail, checks, credit cards, prescription drugs, other medical items, eyeglasses, keys, identity documents such as passports and drivers licenses, and travel documents.

\* ***Keep fragile items out of checked luggage*** - Such items should be in your carry-on bags if at all possible. Even a properly packed fragile item may be at risk in your checked luggage if that item has to be unwrapped in order to be inspected.

\* ***Prepare for a lost, stolen, damaged, or delayed checked bag*** - Checked bags that are delayed usually arrive within a day or two, so pack your carry-on bags so that you will be able to survive for 48 hours at your destination without your checked bags. If you are checking more than one piece of luggage, distribute items so that the loss of one bag will not cause undue hardship. Be prepared to keep a record of any costs related to your delayed or missing bag, or to any damage to the bag or contents so that you can later submit a claim to the airline or to the TSA.

### **What to do once you know you have a problem**

The first step would be to immediately notify the airline, or other responsible organization, of the problem. If there is a report that you have to submit or some other process that you must perform, start the process as soon as possible.

Depending on the problem, you may not be able to complete this process while still at the airport. For example, if items from your luggage were missing or damaged, and you wanted to file a claim for compensation, you may have to take time to gather supporting documentation before you submit a claim. You should complete your documentation as soon as possible, making sure you keep copies of whatever you submit.

\* ***Fill out appropriate paperwork as soon as possible*** - If your checked bag doesn't arrive at the airport with you, or you notice any damage or other problem with your

bag, contact the appropriate airline, airport security, or law enforcement representative and file the appropriate report, preferably before you leave the airport. Keep copies of any reports that you submit so that you can use them if you file a claim or a complaint in the future.

\* ***Don't file a formal complaint too early*** - While it may be appropriate to make an informal complaint when you have a checked bag problem, give the airline time to resolve your problem before you file a formal complaint.

For much more detailed advice on what you should do after you know you have a checked luggage problem, including when to file a formal complaint, review the section [Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#).

### **Additional Information**

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

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## Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage

One of the risks of checking your luggage is that it may be damaged, stolen, lost, or delayed. If you followed the advice given in the sections [Reducing Checked Luggage Problems](#) and [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#), you have already taken sensible steps to minimize the impact of a lost, delayed, or damaged checked bag. Once you realize that you have a bag problem, you have to take action to give yourself the best chance of getting your situation resolved.

### Dealing with delayed luggage

You usually know that your luggage will be delayed either because it was not in the baggage claim area after your arrival, or because an airline representative told you that your bags will not be on the plane with you. The latter situation sometimes happens if the airline decided, perhaps because of last minute schedule changes or cargo loading issues, that you and your bags will be on different flights. As soon as you are aware that your bags will be delayed, you should do the following:

- \* **Contact the airline immediately** - If you don't see your bag in the baggage claim area, contact the airline's baggage office or baggage agent and report your missing bag. If the airline determines that the bag is arriving later and you are not able to wait for your bag at the airport, provide information on where you would like the bag delivered. Many airlines allow you only a limited amount of time to report missing luggage.

- \* **Collect relevant information** - Make sure you keep all of your flight documentation, including the baggage claim ticket and boarding pass, so that you can provide the airline with information to help them find the bag, and to provide you with the basic information you may need to make a claim. You may also want to get information such as the name and contact information of the airline employee who is helping you, or of that person's manager or supervisor, just in case you have to make a claim later.

- \* **Keep track of related expenses** - If you have to buy necessities to replace items in your bag, keep any receipts so that you can justify any future reimbursement expense. Also, ask the airline if they provide any immediate benefits such as free basic toiletry items.

- \* **Start the lost baggage compensation process** - Even if the airline assures you that your bag will arrive, start the process for getting compensation for lost luggage. If the airline has any forms that you will have to fill out, collect them now.

### Dealing with lost or damaged luggage

If you find that your bag has significant damage, has missing items, or if the airline is unable to locate it, you should do the following as soon as you can:

- \* **Fill out any claim forms** - If the airline has any claim forms for lost or damaged luggage, then fill them out and submit the documentation, along with a copy of any supporting information such as your claim ticket and boarding pass. Be sure to keep a copy of any form or document that you submit.

\* ***Get estimated or actual costs of any replacement items*** - If you had to purchase replacement items, make sure you collect all the receipts so you can submit copies with any reimbursement claim to the airline. If you are not going to buy a replacement item immediately, document the estimated replacement costs in order to support any future claim.

\* ***Review the airline's policies*** - Find out what the airline will reimburse by reviewing any documentation they have. If you don't get it directly from an airline representative, you can look for it on the airline's web site. If your only problem was damage to a piece of luggage, keep in mind that airlines typically don't offer reimbursement for what they consider normal wear and tear, things like torn zippers or handles, or broken wheels. Also, airlines have limits on the maximum amount of monetary compensation for each claim, and also rules on what items will not be reimbursed.

### **When to complain if the compensation is not enough**

When your bag is lost, delayed or damaged, no matter how things turn out, you will have endured some level of stress and inconvenience. The best outcome is for the airline to get your checked bag back to you in a reasonable amount of time, or for the airline to provide an appropriate amount of compensation for lost or damaged luggage.

If the airline's actions were not to your liking, you may want to file a complaint with the airline. If you decide to go this route, you may want to consider the following questions before dedicating the time and energy it would take to go through the process:

\* ***Would the money be enough?*** - If your goal is to get financial compensation for a loss, that loss should be worth more than the time it would take to go through with a complaint. For example, if you think you deserve an additional \$200 in compensation, then ask yourself if the time it would take you to complain is worth \$200.

\* ***Will filing a complaint make you feel better?*** - If your complaint gets the result you want, would it make you feel better? Would it make up for whatever hassle you had to go through because of a bag that was lost, stolen, damaged, or delayed? Is filing a complaint the right thing to do because it may benefit others? If you can answer 'yes' to at least one of these questions, then go ahead with the complaint. If you can't, then maybe filing a complaint is not the right thing for you to do.

### **Additional Information**

[Reducing Checked Luggage Problems](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips](#)

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## Top 10 Baggage Tips

If you heed the following advice, you will run into fewer baggage-related problems.

### **1. Travel with only carry-on luggage**

By using only carry-on luggage, you have no risk of having checked luggage lost, damaged, or stolen.

### **2. Remember that you are responsible for carry-on items**

While airlines may compensate you for lost or damaged checked baggage items, your carry-on bags are your responsibility. However, if the airline has to check your carry-on bag, then checked bag rules apply.

### **3. Put your contact information inside and outside every bag.**

In addition to having contact information on the inside and outside of all your checked bags, you may also want to put a copy of your itinerary inside each checked bag to make it easier for the airline to reunite you if you are separated from your luggage. You should also put contact information on your carry-on bag in case you are forced to check it at the last minute. For personal security reasons, you may want to use an email address or mobile phone number for contact information rather than a home number and home address.

### **4. Customize the look of your bag to make it easy to identify.**

Many bags may have a similar design, so customize the bag to make it easy to spot in the baggage claim area. This will keep other passengers from picking it up by mistake, and help keep you from picking up someone else's bag by mistake.

### **5. Keep valuable items with you.**

Money, laptop computers, electronic files, and other high value items should be kept in a carry-on bag, preferably one that is small enough to stow under a seat. Review the section [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#) for more advice on how to deal with valuable items.

### **6. Check that the tag on your checked luggage is for the correct destination.**

Every piece of checked luggage should have a three-letter airport identifier that matches your destination airport. If you are unsure of the city associated with the code, ask the ticket agent or skycap. Also, make sure that the claim number on each tag matches the claim number on your receipt.

### **7. Make sure that you keep the stub or receipt from your checked luggage.**

This is the information you will need if your luggage is lost by the airline or if you are trying to prove that you own a piece of luggage.

### **8. Immediately report missing or damaged checked luggage.**

If your checked bag does not arrive at your destination, immediately report this problem to the baggage agent on duty, or to any other available representative from your airline. Also, if you see any significant damage to your checked bag, report it to the airline

immediately. Review the section [Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#) for more advice on dealing with missing or damaged luggage.

**9. Prepare to deal with a lost or delayed checked bag.**

Pack key items in your carry-on bag, like extra underwear, so you can continue your trip if your checked bags are lost or delayed.

**10. Be prepared to justify any claims for lost or damaged checked items**

For damaged items, it may be easy to demonstrate the amount of damage and the cost of a replacement. If your bag is lost, you will also have to demonstrate the cost of the replacement item, but if it were a high priced item, you may have to provide proof of the original cost.

**Bonus tip #1 - Traveling with gifts**

If you carry gifts, either in checked or carry-on baggage, make sure they are unwrapped. The TSA has to be able to inspect any package and would have to unwrap a wrapped gift to do so. If you don't want to fly with unwrapped gifts, you can mail or ship wrapped gifts ahead of time, or wait until you arrive at your destination to wrap them.

**Bonus tip #2 - If your airline switches planes**

If you get assigned to a new aircraft, for example after a flight is cancelled, ask if you and your checked bags will be on the same plane. If not, be prepared to deal with the airline's lost or missing bag procedures. Also, be prepared to have your larger carry-on items become checked luggage if the new aircraft has smaller overhead bins, or if you are going to be squeezed into an already heavily booked flight.

**Additional Information**

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## **Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips**

If you check luggage, you will have to pick it up in the baggage claim area, sometimes called the baggage reclaim area in airports outside the US. No matter where you are in the world, you face the same kinds of problems, like the airline losing or damaging your bag, or having someone stealing your luggage. If you follow the tips below, you can avoid most baggage claim problems.

### **1. Try to pack less**

The easiest way to avoid baggage claim problems is to not have any checked bags. If you plan on checking two bags, and you find that you can travel with only one checked bag, than do so. If you can get by with just carry-on items, that would be even better.

### **2. Make your bag easy to find**

Many bags look alike, so to make it easy to find your bag quickly, do one or two things to the outside like tying a bright ribbon to a handle, or putting a decal on the side.

### **3. Put your contact information on your bags and inside each bag**

Many bags come with a tag with a little address card. Put your name and contact information on the card. You may want to also put a mobile phone number or email address where you can be reached when you are traveling. You may want to put the same information inside the bag as well.

### **4. Check the Information on the luggage tag**

At the check in counter, when the airline puts their luggage tag on the bag, make sure that the information is correct. The most important pieces of information are the origin and destination airports, which are three-letter codes that will be in capital letters. If you don't know what they are for your departure and arrival airports, ask when you check in. Many tags will also have information about the flight number, and perhaps your name. Make sure that any identification number or other information on your bag's tag matches the information on your claim ticket.

### **5. Get to the baggage claim area before your bags do**

After your plane gets to the gate, make your way to the baggage claim area. If you are in an unfamiliar airport with a large baggage claim area, there may be many baggage carousels. If you are not sure where to go, ask one of your airline's agents, or look for a baggage carousel information board that lists which carousel will have your flight's bags. Even if you are the last person out of a crowded plane, you should be able to get to the baggage claim area ahead of your bags.

### **6. Get into position to grab your bag**

By the time the baggage carousel starts and bags start to come out, there will likely be a crowd of people looking for bags. Because the baggage claim area is not in the secure part of the terminal, you may have to deal with many other people besides the passengers on your flight, including potential thieves. Don't be shy; get close to the carousel so you can grab your bag the first time it comes by.

### **7. Keep off the baggage carousel**

If you get to the carousel before the bags arrive, it may not be moving, and it may be tempting to either sit on the carousel or to let your child play on it. Don't do it. The machine can start at any time and without warning.

### **8. Check your tags before you leave the baggage claim area**

After you collect all your bags, check the tags on your bags with your claim ticket. If the information does not match, check your bag more closely to see if you picked up the right bag. If you accidentally take someone else's bag away from the baggage claim area, you will be responsible for returning it either to the airline or the bag's owner. Also, confirm that the number of checked bags you picked up matches the number of claim tickets you have.

### **9. Prepare for a missing, damaged, or stolen bag**

Sometimes bad things happen to your checked luggage even if you take reasonable precautions. A little bit of preparation can help the airline locate a missing bag, or help you get compensation for lost or damaged items. Among the things that you can do include keeping receipts from when you purchased your bag, or taking photos of the bag and its contents.

### **10. Check your bag for damage before you leave the airport**

While airlines won't compensate you for broken wheels, minor scratches, missing handles, or other things that they consider to be normal wear and tear, if you have major damage to your bag that you think was caused by the airline, report it to the airline as soon as possible. It is best to do it before you leave the airport. Review the section [Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#) for advice on what to do if you have a missing or damaged bag.

### **Bonus Tip - Stolen or misidentified luggage is not the airline's responsibility**

The airline is only responsible for luggage that was lost or damaged while under their control. If someone steals your luggage, if someone accidentally takes your luggage, or if you take someone else's luggage by mistake, the airline has no further responsibility. If your luggage was stolen, then you should contact the appropriate law enforcement agency. If someone takes a piece of your luggage by mistake, it is the responsibility of that person to return that luggage to you.

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## Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage

In the US, both the TSA and the airlines have baggage rules and restrictions that will determine what you can bring on board the aircraft or into the secure area of the airport terminal. Most other countries have similar rules about what is allowed and what is not allowed. Because airline rules and security threats may change at any time, you should check with your airline if you have any questions about any rule changes, or about a particular item that you may want to bring on board.

If you have banned items in your checked or carry-on baggage, you will either not be allowed to bring them on the aircraft, or they may be confiscated or destroyed by the authorities. You would likely be fully responsible for any costs, including fines, related to your banned items.

While it is unlikely that you would normally travel with many of the following banned items, some of them may actually be in your children's baggage, so it is a good idea to go through everyone's checked and carry-on luggage before a trip.

\* ***Explosive and incendiary materials*** - Any item containing gunpowder, black powder, or other explosive material (such as fireworks). Realistic toys that are made to look like explosives, for example a plastic toy grenade, are also not allowed on the plane.

\* ***Flammable items*** - Gasoline, gas torches, lighter fluid, cooking fuel, other types of flammable liquid fuel, flammable paints, paint thinner, turpentine, and aerosols. There are exceptions for personal care items, toiletries, or medically related items. For details on these exceptions, review the section [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#).

\* ***Lighters*** - Although common cigarette lighters are allowed in carry-on baggage (but not checked baggage), torch lighters, which are commonly used to light cigars or pipes, are completely banned from the aircraft.

\* ***Gases and pressure containers*** - Aerosols (with the exception of personal care items or toiletries in limited quantities) are not allowed on the aircraft, and neither are carbon dioxide cartridges, tanks or cylinders containing compressed gases (including the kinds used for paintball guns), mace, tear gas, pepper spray, self-inflating rafts, and deeply refrigerated gases such as liquid nitrogen.

\* ***Poisons*** - Weed killers, pesticides, insecticides, rodent poisons, arsenic, and cyanides.

\* ***Matches*** - All matches are banned from checked baggage, and strike-anywhere matches are banned completely from the aircraft, but each passenger can have a single book of safety (non-strike anywhere) matches in the passenger cabin.

\* ***Oxidizers and organic peroxides*** - Bleach, nitric acid, fertilizers, swimming pool or spa chemicals, and fiberglass repair kits.

\* ***Infectious Materials*** - Medical laboratory specimens, viral organisms, and bacterial cultures.

\* ***Corrosives*** - Drain cleaners, car batteries, wet cell batteries, acids, alkalis, lye, and mercury.

\* ***Organics*** - Fiberglass resins, peroxides.

\* ***Radioactive materials*** - Most such materials are banned, but there are some exceptions for implanted radioactive medical devices. Contact your airline for details on how to ship other radioactive materials.

\* ***Magnetic materials*** - Strong magnets such as those in some loudspeakers and laboratory equipment.

**Note:** If you are in any doubt about whether your item may be hazardous, you should bring it to the attention of either your airline or the security screener.

### **Additional Information**

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

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## Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage

The TSA has prohibited the following items from airplane cabins and carry-on baggage, but they may (with some exceptions) be carried in a checked bag. These limitations are similar for airlines around the world:

\* ***Sporting goods*** - Bats (baseball, softball, cricket), hockey sticks, lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows, skis, ski poles, spear guns, golf clubs, and pool cues.

\* ***Knives*** - Knives of any length, composition or description (except for plastic or round bladed butter knives), swords, machetes, and martial arts weapons such as throwing stars.

\* ***Cutting instruments*** - Carpet knives and box cutters (and spare blades), any device with a folding or retractable blade, ice picks, straight razors, and metal scissors with pointed tips. Small scissors with a cutting edge less than four inches (10 cm) are allowed in the cabin.

\* ***Firearms*** - Pistols, flare guns, BB guns, rifles, and other firearms must be unloaded, packed in a locked hard-sided container, and declared to the airline at check in. State or local laws concerning the carrying of concealed or unconcealed weapons don't apply. Attempting to enter the secure area of the terminal with weapons, even accidentally, may lead to your arrest.

\* ***Firearm replicas*** - Realistic replicas of firearms, including toys that look like real weapons, must be carried as checked baggage. Toy weapons that are not realistic are allowed in checked or carry-on baggage.

\* ***Firearm parts*** - They should be treated like firearms and only carried in checked baggage.

\* ***Ammunition*** - In the US, small arms ammunition for personal use must also be declared to the airline at check-in, and must be securely packed in fiber, wood or metal boxes or other packaging specifically designed to carry small amounts of ammunition. Ammunition, if properly packaged, can also be carried in the same hard-sided case as an unloaded firearm. You should check with the airline to see if it has additional restrictions on either firearms or ammunition.

\* ***Paintball guns*** - Compressed air guns, including paintball guns, may be carried in checked luggage without the compressed air cylinder attached. Tanks or cylinders with compressed gases are not allowed on airliners.

\* ***Tools*** - Tools greater than seven inches (17.8 cm) in length can only be carried in checked baggage. Also, power tools such as drills should also be in checked baggage. Shorter tools, such as wrenches, screwdrivers, and pliers, may be carried in carry-on baggage. Any tool with a sharp or cutting edge like a hand saw, circular saw, box cutter, or drill bit are also limited to checked baggage. If you have a toolbox in checked

baggage, make sure you check every compartment to make sure that your toolbox does not have any containers with flammable liquids, lighters, micro torches, or other banned items. Larger equipment like a stepladder or circular saw should be checked.

\* *Dry ice (frozen carbon dioxide)* - Up to four pounds (1.8 kg) may be used for food or other perishables so long as the package is properly vented.

**Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

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## Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage

There are many items that are not hazardous or prohibited that you can carry either in checked baggage, in carry-on baggage, or on your person. However, if it is an item that is hard to replace, very expensive, or necessary for your mental or physical health, then you should never put that item in checked baggage, where they have a much greater chance of being lost, damaged, or stolen:

\* **Money-related items** - Cash, credit cards, travelers cheques, checkbooks, and anything else that has monetary value should either be on your person or in your carry-on baggage. If you lose money-related items, airlines are not obligated to compensate you, and it is much safer for you to keep these kinds of items with you.

\* **Jewelry** - Necklaces, rings, diamonds, other precious stones, gold, silver, other precious metals, expensive watches, and other small and valuable items should also stay out of checked baggage. Like the situation with money-related items, the airline isn't obligated to compensate you for lost or damaged jewelry items.

\* **Musical instruments** - Airlines will not reimburse you for a lost or damaged musical instrument that was in checked baggage. If the instrument is too large to be a carry-on, you may want to consider purchasing additional insurance, shipping it separately, or buying another ticket and placing the instrument in the seat next to you.

\* **Computers, electronic devices, and accessories** - Laptops, mobile phones, portable data storage devices, handheld electronic games, and other small personal electronic devices should remain on your person or in your carry-on bags.

\* **Medically related items** - Prescription medication, other medications, and other medical items should remain with you in the cabin.

\* **Perishable items** - Food items that may spoil after a day or two should be in your carry-on luggage. The only exception would be those items such as liquids or gels that are banned from the cabin.

\* **Other items** - If it is small and valuable, or if replacing it would be difficult or expensive, then keep it with you in the cabin. Examples include passports and other identification, keys, eyeglasses, photos, tickets, art, boarding passes, travel vouchers, mail, financial records, business documents, software, manuscripts, heirlooms, collectible items, and favorite toys. If you have something else that is small and that you don't want to lose, keep it with you.

### Last minute bag check

Sometimes on full or nearly full flights, the airplane may run out of room, and you may be forced to check your carry-on bag at the gate. You should pack your carry-on bag in a manner so that if it must be gate-checked, you can quickly remove the valuable and critical items and place them in a smaller bag that you can fit under a seat.

If your carry-on bag is too big to fit under your seat, and it contains valuable or very hard to replace items, insist that the bag stay with you. If necessary, work with the flight attendant to keep your items with you in the cabin.

### **Other options**

If you have no choice but to put a valuable item in checked baggage, you should take steps to protect your items from theft, damage, or loss. This includes options like purchasing appropriate insurance, shipping it separately, leaving the item at home, or even buying another ticket and putting the valuable item in an adjacent passenger seat.

### **Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

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## **Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols**

After a failed 2006 plot to bomb US-bound airliners using liquid-based explosives, the US and most other countries have severely restricted the amounts of liquids, gels, and aerosols a passenger may have in carry-on luggage. If you have these kinds of items in your carry-on bags, you will likely either have to throw them away, put them in a checked bag, or ship them to your destination by some other means.

Fortunately for families with infants and small children, the TSA allows exceptions for items such as baby formula, processed baby food, breast milk, juice, or water.

Below are details about the kinds of liquids, gels, and aerosols that are restricted from carry-on baggage, as well as exceptions to those restrictions. If you are planning to carry food items for your family, be sure that you don't pack something that will not be allowed on the plane.

### **General rules for liquid, gel, and aerosol products**

Passengers may bring items containing liquids, aerosols, and gels into the secure area of the airport, so long as each individual container has a capacity of no greater than 3.4 fluid ounces (100 ml).

Be aware that the rule applies to the capacity of the container, not to the amount that is in the container. For example, if you have a 16 ounce shampoo bottle with only two ounces of shampoo, you will not be allowed to take the item through security.

### **Food items**

Food items largely made out of liquid or gel products are only allowed in checked baggage unless you buy them in the terminal after you pass through security. If you bring the following items to the airport, you should plan on placing them in a checked bag:

- \* Cranberry sauce
- \* Creamy dips and spreads (cheeses, peanut butter, etc.)
- \* Gravy
- \* Jams, jellies, and syrup
- \* Oils and vinegars
- \* Salad dressing
- \* Salsa
- \* Sauces
- \* Soups
- \* Gift baskets with one or more of the above items

### **Exemptions for certain liquid and gel products**

Passengers can go through security screening with liquid, gel, or aerosol items in containers larger than 3.4 fluid ounces (100 ml) if they fall under one of the following exemptions:

\* ***Prescription and over the counter drugs*** - Prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and health related items such as diabetes related supplies, petroleum jelly, lubricating gels, eye drops, and saline solution.

\* ***Items for infants and small children*** - Baby formula, breast milk, juice, or water is allowed for a traveling infant or small child. Breast milk is in the same category as liquid medications. A mother flying without her child should be able to bring breast milk through the checkpoint, provided it is declared prior to screening. You are also allowed to bring a number of other liquid or gel items for your child, including gel or liquid-filled teethers, canned, jarred, or processed baby food.

\* ***Purchased after screening*** - Once a passenger has passed through security screening, they can purchase liquid, aerosol, or gel products in the terminal and take them on to the plane.

\* ***Disabled passengers*** - Liquids including water, juice; and liquid or gel nutrition supplements for passengers with a disability or medical condition.

\* ***Life-support and life-sustaining liquids*** - Items such as bone marrow, blood products, and transplant organs fit into this category. Frozen gels or liquids are permitted if they are required to cool medical items or nutrition related supplies such as infant formula. Ice is permitted as long as there is no melted liquid present.

\* ***Certain prosthetic devices*** - Items used to augment the body for medical or cosmetic reasons such as mastectomy products, prosthetic breasts; and bras or shells containing gels, saline solution, or other liquids.

\* ***Cosmetic and hygiene items*** - Solid cosmetics and personal hygiene items such as lipstick in a tube, solid deodorant, lip balm and similar solids are allowed. Please remember these items must be solid and not in liquid, gel or aerosol form.

\* ***Snow globes*** - Larger snow globes and similar liquid-filled decorations, no matter what size, can only be carried in checked luggage. Such items are allowed in your carry-on if it has less than 3.4 ounces (100 ml) of liquid. Snow globes typically don't come with volume indicators, and the TSA suggests that globes up to about the size of a tennis ball will be acceptable.

#### **Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

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## Using Electronic Devices on the Plane

If you are flying with older children, they will likely have one or more electronic devices with them, or they may use one of your electronic devices during the flight. You and your children should be aware of the general rules for using electronic devices, as well as the things you should do to make sure your devices are ready when you need them.

### Devices you can use in the plane

There are four categories of electronic devices you can take on the plane:

- 1. Devices you can use at all times** - This would include medical devices such as pacemakers, electronic nerve stimulators, and hearing aids. About the only typical consumer electronic item you can use at all times is a digital watch.
- 2. Devices you can't use on an airplane** - You can bring the following items on board the aircraft in checked or carry-on baggage, but you can't turn them on at any time: AM or FM radios, televisions, scanners, two-way radios, remote controlled devices, and any kind of radio transmitter (for example, a wireless mouse).
- 3. Devices you can use during portions of the flight** - Typically, the following can be used in the cabin during boarding before the passenger doors close, and then again from the time the aircraft reaches 10,000 feet (about five minutes after takeoff) until the flight crew begins the approach phase about 15 minutes before landing: laptop computers, tablet computers, ebook readers, mobile phones in "game" or "airplane" mode, digital cameras, DVD or CD players, GPS receivers, handheld electronic games, and calculators.
- 4. Devices you can use before the aircraft door closes or after landing** - This includes all of the devices in the previous category with a couple of exceptions. You can use all the functions of a mobile phone, including making or receiving calls. After landing, you can typically use only handheld devices like mobile phones, but not larger electronic devices like a laptop computer.

### Airline wireless networks

Some airlines have wireless Internet capability in their aircraft. If you are flying in one of these aircraft, you can use your computer, mobile phone, or other device to connect to this system. Often, there is a charge to use this system.

### Acceptable behavior with electronic devices

There are few, if any, written rules about what you can do with your electronic device. However, you or your family members shouldn't do anything that would annoy or disturb other passengers. The basic do's and don'ts include the following:

- \* **Do use headphones or earphones** - When playing any device that has a speaker, including handheld electronic games, DVD players, laptops, or iPads, either turn off the audio or use headphones or earphones. If that is not possible, consider not using the

device.

\* ***Don't display inappropriate moving or still images*** - With rare exceptions, you can legally display any kind of image you want on your laptop, mobile phone, or other device. However, if what's on the screen may be disturbing to other passengers and can be easily seen from nearby seats, the flight attendant may ask you to turn it off. Potentially disturbing images generally include sexually oriented material and depictions of extreme acts of violence.

\* ***Don't talk loudly on the phone*** - You are allowed to use your mobile phone during boarding, after the aircraft lands, and in some cases if the aircraft is delayed on the ground for a significant amount of time. You shouldn't have to speak so loudly that passengers several rows away can hear you, especially if you are discussing personal issues that should be no one else's business.

\* ***Do keep in flight calls short*** - Some aircraft are equipped with in-flight phone systems, and on aircraft with inflight wireless capability, you can use Skype and similar services to make calls in the air.

\* ***Don't record or photograph anyone without permission*** - An airplane is a very public place. The only place anyone has any privacy is in the lavatory. However, you must make it clear to your family that it is very bad manners to take pictures or videos of other passengers without their permission. Your kids may think that the snoring passenger across the aisle would make a great YouTube video, but that would be a very bad idea indeed.

### **Powering your electronics**

If anyone in your family plans on using a mobile phone, laptop, video game, or other electronic device during the trip, make sure that the devices are fully charged before you leave for the airport, and that there's at least one set of spare batteries for any battery-powered device.

With very rare exceptions, airliners don't have electrical outlets that you can use in flight. While most airport terminals have outlets that you can use, very often they are few in number and inconveniently placed. If you are about to get on a long flight of several hours, you should take any opportunity to recharge your device as much as possible before boarding.

Popular battery sizes such as AA and AAA are usually available in the airport terminal, but the prices are usually much higher than outside the airport. If you're using a less popular battery type, you may not be able to find it at the airport, so plan on buying spares ahead of time.

### **Suggestions for extending battery life**

If you are taking a long flight, or you think that your device's battery will run out before you can recharge it, you may want to do one or more of the following to keep your device alive a little longer:

\* If you aren't using it, turn it off.

- \* If you are not using the wireless capability of your device, switch it off.
- \* Turn down the brightness of your display to the lowest useable level.
- \* If you use multiple devices, see if you can use one of them as a backup power source or charging source for a second one (a trick I've used on my iPhone/laptop combination more than once).
- \* On a laptop, close applications or programs that you are not actively using.

### **How to carry your personal electronics**

Mobile phones, laptops, and other electronic devices are attractive to thieves and easily stolen. For those reason, you should not put them in a checked bag. Another reason to keep them with you is that electronic devices are relatively fragile and more likely to be damaged if it is in a checked bag. Also, airlines will typically not reimburse you if your electronics are in a checked bag and are stolen, damaged, or lost.

### **Additional Resources**

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

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## Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children

Thinking about letting your child fly alone? Make sure you check with your airline before you buy a ticket. Most airlines allow a child well under the age of 18 to fly alone, but often with significant restrictions for younger children. For those airlines that have programs to supervise unaccompanied children, the rules may be very different among these airlines.

In the US, the FAA provides no clear regulatory guidelines either for travel by unaccompanied children, or for airline programs for supervising unaccompanied children, so it is important that you take the time to understand the special risks when children travel alone, as well as the rules, including any extra fees, of the unaccompanied child programs you may want to use. This overview will discuss the typical restrictions of these programs, as well as a number of issues that you may want to address before allowing your child to travel alone on an airplane.

### Typical airline age rules for children

Airlines treat children traveling alone differently depending on the age of the child, and the rules of that airline's unaccompanied child program. Most airlines have a minimum age for children traveling alone and unsupervised, typically around 12, and most airline unaccompanied child programs limit the program to children within a certain age range, typically between five and 12.

Below are a series of child travel scenarios, and the typical airline rules that may apply to that scenario. Because the rules vary by airline, the following scenarios may not exactly match the rules of any particular airline:

\* ***Children younger than five*** - Must be accompanied either by an adult aged 18 or over, or by the child's parent or legal guardian.

\* ***Children between five and 11*** - The airline may require that you use their unaccompanied child program if the child is traveling alone, or if there are a group of children traveling together and all of the children are between five and 11. However, the program may not be required if the child is traveling with an older passenger. The minimum age of that older passenger may vary by airline, and may be as young as 12 and as old as 18.

\* ***Children 12 to 17*** - You may use the unaccompanied child program, but the airline will not require that you do so.

If your child appears to be above or below an age limit set by the airline, you or your child may be asked to provide some kind of proof of age, so be prepared to bring appropriate documentation to the airport.

### Other restrictions and requirements

For unaccompanied children traveling under the airline's supervision, there may be additional restrictions. While the number and type of restrictions vary by airline, typical

restrictions may include the following:

- \* Restricting unaccompanied children to nonstop flights
- \* Having a higher minimum age if the child has to change planes
- \* Not allowing unaccompanied children on the last flight of the day
- \* Not allowing unaccompanied children on flights that involve a change of planes involving a second carrier
- \* Requiring an earlier check in time
- \* Requiring the person dropping off the child to accompany the child to the departure gate
- \* Requiring that the person picking up the child show up prior to the scheduled arrival time
- \* Charging additional fees for unaccompanied children

### **Issues with older children**

Many airlines require you to use their unaccompanied child program for children 12 and under, and offer it as an option for older children between 13 and 17. However, older children may not be able to use special services available for younger unaccompanied children such as having an escort while at an airport or being allowed to board the aircraft early.

Older children who are flying alone, with or without the benefit of an airline's unaccompanied child program, face other issues. The most important is that the child will have to be able to deal with any travel problem that comes up. This may include lost, stolen, or damaged baggage; airline security issues, flight delays, and flight cancellations. You should prepare your child for common air travel problems and make sure that your child understands what to do in these situations.

### **Identification requirements**

For domestic travel in the US, passengers under the age of 18 are not required to have TSA approved identification to get past security. Depending on the airline, a minor child may not be required to have identification to purchase a ticket or get a boarding pass issued. However, if a child is using the airline's unaccompanied child program, the adults who are responsible for picking up and dropping off the child are required to have acceptable identification.

While airlines typically don't specify the identification required for the adult who drops off or picks up the child, the same kinds of government-issued photo identification that is acceptable to the TSA should be sufficient. You can review the [TSA Identification Requirements](#) section for a detailed description of ID that the TSA finds acceptable.

While not required, it is a good idea for teenagers to have a valid photo ID. AirSafe.com recommends using an ID that would be acceptable for domestic travel and that does not

contain the child's home address.

A US passport is especially attractive because it doesn't include the passport holder's address. The same is also true for passports from many other countries. State-issued photo identification cards are typically issued by the same organizations that provide drivers licenses and they are also an acceptable form of identification.

### **Escorting the child to and from the aircraft**

You should escort your child all the way to the departure gate, even if the airline doesn't require it. Also, the person picking up the child should be waiting at the gate at the arrival airport. You will likely need to get an escort pass or similar document from the airline in order to enter the gate area. If you are not allowed to escort your child into the secure area of the airport, make sure that an appropriate airline representative is personally escorting your child.

### **Supervision by airline employees**

The level of supervision that the airline has for unaccompanied children will vary by airline. It is very unlikely that the airline will have an escort at your child's side in the aircraft. While in flight, your child will likely be supervised by the flight attendants. Make sure that a flight attendant, preferably the chief flight attendant, is aware of your unaccompanied child. Also, make sure that your child understands that if he or she has any questions or has any problems, then he or she should talk to a flight attendant.

If your child has to take a connecting flight, make sure that your child knows that he or she has to be escorted to the next flight by an airline representative. Once your child is in the waiting area, there may be an airline representative at that airport who will be responsible for supervising your child between flights, but that person will likely have additional duties, including supervising other children. Make sure that your child understands the need to stay within sight of the responsible airline employee. If you think that your child may not be able to handle this kind of situation, then only use nonstop flights.

### **What happens if the aircraft is diverted or delayed?**

Once the flight departs, the aircraft may have to make an unscheduled landing, either at the departure airport or at an alternate airport. Also, a connecting flight could be delayed or canceled. Typically, the airline will contact the persons responsible for picking up or dropping off the child and will make other flight arrangements. This could include arranging transportation back to the departure airport, arranging a later flight to the original destination, or arranging a flight to an alternative airport where a responsible adult can pick up the child.

A child who is flying alone, but who is not using the airline's unaccompanied child program, will likely be treated like any other passenger. Your child should tell an airline representative of his or her travel situation, but that is no guarantee that the airline will be willing or able to offer any additional services.

Depending on the airline's policies, if the flight is delayed overnight, and your child is flying under the airline's unaccompanied child program, the airline may place your

child in a hotel room under the supervision of an airline representative, in a hotel room alone, or in a hotel room with another unaccompanied child. The airline may also have a policy where it takes no responsibility for overnight accommodations for an unaccompanied child and may turn your child over to the local authorities for the night.

It is important that you have a clear understanding of the airline's policies. Before you make a reservation, you should go to the airline's web site and review the airline's policies on unaccompanied children.

### **What happens if no one is there to pick up my child?**

If for some reason there is no responsible adult at the destination airport, what happens next will depend on the airline's policies. The airline may make an effort to contact the person who was to pick up your child, and if there were some kind of short delay, there will likely not be any problems. If no one can be contacted at the destination, then the responsible adult at the departure airport may be contacted to discuss alternatives. For these reasons, it is very important that the airline have several alternatives for contacting a responsible adult at both the destination and departure airports. If no one is available to take responsibility for your child, the airline may have to turn your child over to the local authorities.

### **International flights**

If your child is traveling unaccompanied on an international flight, there may be additional requirements beyond what the airline may require. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to have additional documentation to allow your child to leave the departure country or to enter the destination country. Contact the appropriate authorities for each country to ensure that all requirements are being met.

### **Flights on partner airlines**

While you may arrange for your child's travel through one airline, your child may end up on a subsidiary of that airline or with a partner airline for part of the trip, or even the entire trip. Check with the airline to see if your child's trip will involve a subsidiary of that airline or a partner of that airline. If this is the case, review the policies for the other airline to see if those policies are acceptable to you. If they are not, you should make alternative travel arrangements.

### **Unaccompanied flying checklists**

In addition to reviewing the section [Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Problems](#) well in advance of your child's flight, you can also review the following checklists just before or even during your child's flight:

#### **Checklist for adults**

- \* Review the airline's written policies.
- \* Find out how to contact the appropriate airline representative at both the departure airport and the destination airport.
- \* Provide the airline with at least two ways to contact a responsible adult (preferably two or more responsible adults) at both the departure airport and the arrival airport.

- \* Have your child carry a copy of that same contact information.
- \* Make sure that the person dropping off or picking up your child has valid photo identification.
- \* If possible, escort your child to or from the aircraft.
- \* Remain at the airport at least until the aircraft takes off.
- \* Check on the progress of the flight, and if the flight will be delayed or diverted, contact both the airline and the responsible adult at the destination airport.
- \* If your child is able to use a telephone, provide your child with the means to make phone calls (change, phone card, mobile phone, etc.).

### **Checklist for children**

- \* At the airport, find out what person from the airline is responsible for you.
- \* While waiting to board your flight, stay in the gate area and in sight of the airline employee who is responsible for you.
- \* If you have to leave the gate area, make sure that an airline employee is either escorting you or is aware of your location.
- \* In the airplane, contact the flight attendant if there are any problems or if you have any questions.
- \* When you get on the airplane, ask a flight attendant if you can be seated so that no one is sitting next to you.

### **Additional resources**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Problems](#)

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## **Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Problems**

If you have to send your child on a trip alone, just the thought of your child being stranded in a strange city, or having his or her bags lost or damaged is more than a little stressful. You should not allow your child to travel alone, even if you use the airline's unaccompanied child program, unless you have made an effort to avoid potential problems.

As is the case with travel by adults, avoiding a problem before it happens or dealing with a problem quickly and effectively is much better than complaining about it afterwards. The best way to avoid serious travel problems is to take steps that will do one of three things:

1. Avoid potential problems entirely.
2. Reduce the likelihood of a problem occurring.
3. Limit the impact of a problem should one occur.

In addition to the usual risks that come with flying, there are additional risks that are associated with children flying alone. Many of these risks can be overcome by using common sense and taking a few basic precautions. The information in the article [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#), plus the following tips will help both a child traveling solo, and those responsible for the child, to deal with many common situations faced by unaccompanied children.

### **Consider the maturity of your child**

While airlines allow children as young as five to travel unaccompanied, younger children may not be ready or willing to be in the presence of strangers for several hours, and may not be able to handle unusual situations that he or she may encounter.

AirSafe.com makes the following recommendation: if your child is old enough to travel alone on public transportation, and is able to spend time away from family in an organized setting like an overnight trip with a youth group, then your child is probably mature enough to travel unaccompanied on a flight. If your child is unable to meet this standard, then you should consider other travel options.

### **Coordinate with whoever is picking up your child**

While the airline is responsible for your child during the flight, you or whoever is picking up your child are responsible once the flight is over. Make sure that whoever is picking up your child knows all the relevant details of your child's trip and is able to contact either you or the airline to confirm the arrival time of the flight.

The person picking up your child should also have identification that matches the information that you supplied the airline. You should have the pickup person arrive early at the airport and contact you when he or she arrives. If you can't confirm the pickup person's arrival at the airport, have an alternate person pick up your child.

You should also give your child a copy of all of the contact information that you

supplied the airline. If your child is able to use a telephone, tell your child to contact someone if there is a flight cancellation, flight delay, or other problem.

### **Tell your child what to expect during the flight**

You should explain clearly to your child what will likely happen during the flight, and what kind of experiences to expect. This is especially important if your child is an infrequent or first time flyer. He or she should know basic things such as how long the flight will be, and who should be meeting your child at the destination airport.

### **Dealing with fear of flying**

When a child flies alone, it is stressful for the child and stressful for your family. While the risk of flying is very, very low, it is not unusual for either adults or children to be anxious about some part of the flying experience. If you visit the main AirSafe.com fear of flying page at [fear.airsafe.com](http://fear.airsafe.com), you'll find plenty of information on the subject, including [fear of flying warning signs](#) that you may recognize in your child.

If you or your child want or need additional assistance, an excellent resource is the [SOAR fear of flying program](#), which is one of the few programs designed to help people deal with fear of flying that is led by an airline pilot, Captain Tom Bunn, who is also a trained therapist. You can also [click here for more information or to order the SOAR program](#).

If you use the coupon code AIRSAFEBOOK when you order, you will get a 20% discount on SOAR's most comprehensive programs. This code is good until the end of 2013. Note that if you are ordering after this code expires, contact us at [tcurtis@airsafe.com](mailto:tcurtis@airsafe.com), and we will send you a new coupon code.

### **Discuss appropriate behavior with your child**

Make sure you take the time to discuss appropriate behavior with your child. That includes the behavior of other passengers and the child's behavior. If another passenger acts in an inappropriate way, be sure that you tell your child to contact a flight attendant or other airline representative.

Inappropriate passenger behavior includes rude, offensive, or threatening comments; inappropriate touching, inappropriate conversations, taking food or other items away from your child, or other behavior that makes your child uncomfortable or fearful. In addition, inappropriate behavior would include any attempt to elicit personal information about your child. Make sure that your child understands that no other passenger needs to know his or her full name, home address, destination, or telephone number.

### **Request appropriate seating**

When you make a reservation, request to have your child seated in a row without any other passengers, or with at least one empty seat between the child and the next passenger. Also, request that your child not sit in the same row as passengers who are consuming alcohol. Tell your child that if he or she is uncomfortable in any way, from the temperature of the cabin to the behavior of other people (either in the terminal or on the plane), that he or she should immediately contact a flight attendant or other airline

representative.

### **Review the airline's unaccompanied child policies**

Every airline has slightly different policies on how they accommodate unaccompanied children. Take special note of their policies for escorting children at connection airports, and the actions the airline will take if your child's flight is delayed or diverted. Note that some airlines don't provide hotel accommodations, and may turn over your child to local authorities if the flight is delayed overnight. General information and insights concerning airline policies are available in the book section [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#).

For full details on an airline's rules for unaccompanied children, go to the airline's web site. These rules may be in a page dedicated to their unaccompanied child program, or it may be located in another part of the web site. You can use a search engine to find this information, or you can call the airline's customer service number and have someone help you find the information you need. If your child will be on a trip that involves flights on two or more different airlines, review the rules for each airline to see if there are any rules that may pose a problem for you or your child.

### **Take extra precautions for connecting flights**

If your child has to change planes, make sure that the airline has an adequate process for supervising your child when traveling between gates or while in the waiting area. Make sure that your child understands that her or she should be escorted when traveling between gates, and must remain in clear view of the escort or other responsible airline representative while in the waiting area.

### **Spend extra time at the airport**

You should plan on coming to the airport early and staying until you confirm that your child's flight has departed. If there are last minute changes before the flight's scheduled departure, getting there early gives you a better opportunity to deal with the situation. Also, if there is a significant delay or a cancellation of the flight, you will be available to deal with the situation. For example, if a flight diversion or flight delay means that your child may have to spend a night in a strange city, you would likely want to work with the airline to reschedule your child's flight.

### **Identify the lead flight attendant**

Either you or your child should take the time to identify the lead flight attendant so that the attendant knows that there is an unaccompanied child on the flight. On larger aircraft, you should identify at least one flight attendant who will be in the immediate area of your child.

### **Avoid checking luggage**

If possible, have your child use only carry-on bags. Avoiding checked luggage makes the travel experience simpler for your child. If the carry-on bag is small enough to fit under the seat, it is much less likely that the airline would check the bag if the overhead bins were full.

### **Have your child carry identification**

While the TSA and the airlines allow passengers under the age of 18 to travel without a government-issued ID, it would be a good idea to have your child carry some form of identification. Ideally, this would be a government-issued document such as a passport or state ID card. If not, some other kind of ID card or an official document with your child's name would help.

### **Have your child carry contact information**

Make sure your child has the contact information for anyone who will be responsible for picking up or dropping off your child at either the departure or arrival airport. Also make sure your child has contact information for an alternative or emergency contact person.

### **Escort the child to the seat**

Although you are not a passenger, you may be able to go to the check in counter and get a pass that allows you to get through security and escort your child to the plane. If possible, escort your child onto the aircraft and check the area around your child's seat for hazards such as heavy carry-on items in the overhead storage bins. If you are concerned about the seating situation or about nearby passengers, contact the lead flight attendant or a gate agent to help deal with the situation.

### **Additional resources**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#)

[Fear of flying resources](#)

[SOAR fear of flying program](#)

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## **About AirSafe.com**

The site was created in July 1996 by Dr. Todd Curtis to provide the aviation community and the flying public with timely and useful information about airline safety and airline security. Over the years, the site has expanded its role by adding significant information and resources related to baggage issues, airline complaints, and fear of flying. AirSafe.com has also expanded its reach by creating a variety of information resources, including the following:

### **The AirSafe.com News**

[www.airsafenews.com](http://www.airsafenews.com)

This site features news and commentary about airline safety, airline security, plane crashes, and airline policy developments.

### **The Conversation at AirSafe.com podcast**

[podcast.airsafe.com](http://podcast.airsafe.com)

This audio and video podcast series features discussions of critical and timely issues related to aviation safety and aviation security. You can subscribe to the podcast using an RSS feed or through iTunes.

### **FlightsGoneBad.com**

[www.flightsgonebad.com](http://www.flightsgonebad.com)

This site features complaints from the AirSafe.com airline complaint system, as well as from other sources, that highlight problems passengers have with airline customers service, airport security, baggage handling, and other travel hassles.

### **The AirSafe.com YouTube channel**

[video.airsafe.com](http://video.airsafe.com)

Features several years worth of AirSafe.com videos, including analyses of accident investigations, and selected podcast episodes.

### **AirSafe.com Fear of Flying Resources**

[Download the AirSafe.com fear of flying resource guide](#)

[Fear of flying warning signs](#)

### **Connect with AirSafe.com**

There are a number of ways to keep in touch with AirSafe.com, including Twitter, Facebook, and a mailing list:

**Twitter:** [twitter.airsafe.com](http://twitter.airsafe.com)

**Facebook:** [facebook.airsafe.com](http://facebook.airsafe.com)

**Mailing list:** [subscribe.airsafe.com](http://subscribe.airsafe.com)

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## About the Author

Dr. Todd Curtis is a published author who in 1996 created the Web's most popular airline safety site, [AirSafe.com](http://AirSafe.com). He holds a PhD in aviation risk assessment from the Union Institute, as well as engineering degrees from MIT, the University of Texas, and Princeton. His aviation safety work has been featured by numerous news organizations, including the New York Times, and he has appeared on CNN, CBS, Fox News, Discovery Channel, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and National Public Radio. This book highlights some of the most popular subjects covered in [AirSafe.com](http://AirSafe.com), [AirSafeNews.com](http://AirSafeNews.com), and other sites created by Dr. Curtis.

Previously, he has published a number of technical papers in the areas of airline safety and aviation risk assessment and authored the 2000 book *Understanding Aviation Safety Data*. In 2007 he also published the online safety book *Parenting and the Internet*, which was updated in 2011 for the ebook version.

### Other Books by Todd Curtis

[Understanding Aviation Safety Data](#)

[Parenting and the Internet](#)

[The Art of Travel: Baggage and Carry-on Advice](#)

[The Art of Travel: Airline Complaint Guide](#)

[AirSafe.com Podcasting Production Manual](#)

### Connect with Dr. Curtis Online

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