

Breastfeeding and Medication



Travel Sickness and Breastfeeding

Medication to prevent travel sickness:

- Cinnarazine
- Prochlorperazine
- Hyoscine
- Promethazine (if sleep helps prevent symptoms)
- Diazepam (one or two low dose tablets to alleviate fear of flying)

Causes of travel sickness

Travel sickness or motion sickness happens when the body, the inner ear, and the eyes send conflicting signals to the brain. This most often happens when you are in a car, boat, or airplane, but it may also happen on flight simulators or amusement park rides.

It is more common in children and in women. Sitting in the back of the car can also be a trigger for many people or a on a coach. I personally find the new trains which are faster much harder to deal with as they seem to sway much more.

It is difficult as a breastfeeding mother to deal with your own travel sickness as well as a baby or children. You may be able to drive rather than be a passenger. If not ,then there are medications which you can take which wont reduce your supply (because only being used short term) or affect your baby. Some temporary drowsiness is possible with any medicine which makes you drowsy.

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May 2023 *The information on this sheet is based upon my professional experience as a pharmacist with a specialised interest in the safety of drugs in breastmilk, supported by evidence from expert sources. However, I cannot take responsibility for the prescription of medication which remains with the healthcare professionals involved. I am happy to discuss the evidence by email wendy@breastfeeding-and-medication.co.uk*

Symptoms of travel sickness

Symptoms can come on very suddenly but rapidly escalate:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Pale skin
- Cold sweats
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Increased salivation
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Rapid breathing

These are symptoms not dissimilar to panic.

Medication

- If you are breastfeeding and need to care for a baby you may prefer one that is less likely to cause drowsiness – e.g. cinnarizine (Stugeron™)
- Hyoscine (Kwells™, Joy Rides™) is usually regarded as the most effective medicine for motion sickness taken 30-60 minutes before the journey.
- Prochlorperazine (Buccastem™, Stemetil™)
- Cyclizine might be prescribed for you but is no longer available over the counter.
- Hyoscine patch can be prescribed. These are applied behind the ear 5-6 hours before travelling.
- Metoclopramide and domperidone may be useful to slow gastric emptying but are generally not prescribed for travel sickness.
- Homeopathic remedies e.g. Nelson's Travella has limited research but is not harmful to the breastfed infant if it is a remedy which the mother finds useful.
- Antihistamines which cause drowsiness e.g. promethazine (Phenergan™, chlorpheniramine (Piriton™) may be useful for children who struggle with travel sickness although it is rare before the age of 2 years.

Acupressure Bands

Some studies suggest that acupressure may help reduce symptoms of motion sickness in the same way as acupuncture. Acupressure bands are available commercially to help prevent motion sickness. Studies suggest these bands may help delay the onset of symptoms.

Traditionally, the acupuncture point known as Pericardium 6 is said to help relieve nausea. It is on the inside of the wrist, about the length of 2 fingernails up the arm from the centre of the wrist crease.

To reduce risk of travel sickness without medication

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/motion-sickness/>

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- sit in the front of a car or in the middle of a boat.
- look straight ahead at a fixed point, such as the horizon rather than at a book, phone screen or portable device.
- fresh air e.g. open a car window
- close your eyes and breathe slowly while focusing on your breathing.
- distract children by talking, listening to music or singing songs.
- break up long journeys to get some fresh air, drink water or take a walk.
- some people recommend ginger, as a tablet, biscuit or tea but if you have had significant sickness in pregnancy this may bring back memories!
- Avoid heavy or fatty meals.

Fear of flying

One of the questions I have had frequently at this time of year has been about supporting the breastfeeding mother who has a fear of flying. I know this feeling myself so can empathise. I have always wanted to keep my headphones on and focus on breathing and listening to my music/relaxation most just when you are coming in to land and are told to take them off. I resort to counting backwards from a thousand.

However, diazepam as one or two low doses can be prescribed during breastfeeding. At worst the baby may temporarily be a little drowsy, but in practice this doesn't seem to happen (they are often too busy looking round and being social!)

Don't forget to pack plastic bags or bowls (just in case), wipes and cold water if the worst happens.

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