

FLYING MYTHS, BUSTED!



Ladies and bumps, please prepare for take-off. But ... wait! Will my baby be all right? What happens if I go into labour on board? **MH** takes a look at some of the myths surrounding flying while pregnant.

WORDS MARIE KREFT

FALSE

Flying is bad for your unborn baby, especially in the first and third trimesters.

As long as you are healthy and having a straightforward pregnancy, there is no evidence to suggest occasional flying poses any significant risks to you or your baby. Not even in those uncertain early weeks, or later on when you feel as though your body mass could ground even a jumbo jet.

The main reason airlines provide a cut-off date after which you are not allowed to fly (generally beyond 36 weeks of pregnancy, and only with a medical certificate from 29 weeks) is because they do not want you going into labour mid-air.

FALSE

Flying increases your risk of pregnancy complications.

Again, if you're in good health and enjoying a straightforward pregnancy, there is no evidence to suggest that occasional flying will increase your risk of complications.

Common sense does apply when it comes to feeling well, though. If you're in the throes of morning sickness or have a stuffy nose then being 30,000 feet in the sky in a dry environment may not help. Jetlag might hit you harder than usual. Your back may ache from sitting in a cramped space for a long time. None of these things will harm your baby, but you might feel dishevelled and tired by the time you land.

It's a good idea to talk to your doctor about your travel plans. Dr Lim Min Yu, associate consultant at NUH Women's Centre, says: "It is important to discuss with your obstetrician

about the safety of travelling by air if you have any conditions that may complicate the pregnancy and could lead to an increase in risk or problems, such as severe anaemia, recent bleeding, middle ear infection [otitis media] or sinusitis". He also gives useful advice regarding flights lasting more than four hours.

"Try to move about the cabin every half an hour or so. Keeping mobile will reduce the aches and pains of sitting in one position for too long, and will also reduce the likelihood of ankle and leg swelling [oedema] and, importantly, reduce the chance of deep venous [or vein] thrombosis."

Because you are at slightly higher risk than non-pregnant travellers of developing DVT, a type of serious blood clot in a major vein, you may also wish to invest in a pair of fitted graduated elastic compression stockings. Also known as flight socks, these sexy-looking items make it harder for a clot to form.

"If you have additional risk factors for thrombosis such as a previous DVT, morbid obesity or medical problems such as nephrotic syndrome, low-molecular-weight heparin (LMWH) injections should be considered for the day of travel and several days after," says Dr Lim.

Therefore, it's always wise to consult your doctor before you go.

NOT KNOWN YET

Frequent flying is bad for pregnant women and their babies.

If you have to fly frequently for work, it's important to talk to your doctor and your employer early on in your pregnancy to work out the safest possible plan of action.

Dr Lim says: "The increased radiation exposure associated with flying is not considered significant in terms of risk to the mother or foetus for occasional flights but flight crew are not usually allowed to fly while pregnant as their exposure would be substantially greater."

Apart from the fact that not enough is yet known about the effects of prolonged exposure to cosmic radiation, frequent flying can be physically and mentally tiring – and even more so in pregnancy.

NOT
NECESSARILY

If I go into labour there will be medical staff on board – right?

While it might reassure you to know that Singapore Airlines crew are trained on how to help deliver a baby, this isn't the case for all airlines.

All airlines' cabin crew are trained in first aid, but commercial carriers will not have dedicated in-flight medics. This is why you may have heard, in movies or in real life, an announcement asking "is there a doctor on board?"

Many airlines now have technology which enables them to speak to telemedical centres on the ground for advice – and, in a real emergency, the plane may be diverted to the nearest airport that has a hospital in close proximity.

UNCONFIRMED

If you give birth on board an aircraft, the airline will give you and your baby free flights for life.

It was reported in 2009 that Liew Siaw Hsia, a Malaysian woman who delivered her baby on an AirAsia flight from Penang to Kuching, was given free passage with that airline for life, as was her new son.

However, no airline would confirm or deny that this would happen again. Probably they don't want offer incentives for flying too near to your due date.


It's probably not worth testing this myth, either.

IT'S
COMPLICATED

If you give birth on board, your baby will take the nationality of whichever country's airspace you're travelling in at the time.

Depending on the laws of the territory over which the aircraft is flying at the time of birth, nationality may be determined by jus solis (the child's place of birth – which may also mean the country over which the aircraft was flying or the country in which the aircraft was registered) or jus sanguinis (the child's bloodline, further complicated by the nationality or citizenship of the baby's parents). Your in-flight bundle may even end up with dual citizenship.

As for the registered place of birth, every country has different rules: some count the place in which the aircraft was registered; others note the place where the child first disembarked.

One thing you can relax about, though: when you arrive at your destination it's unlikely your newborn will be arrested for travelling without a passport. As long as you tell them the stork was to blame. 

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