

Important Tips for Traveling with Baby

Even under the best of circumstances, air travel can be stressful. Packing, arriving at the airport on time, getting through security, and dealing with flight delays can wear on you. Add a baby to the scenario, and it's even more of a struggle. But proper preparation can ease the process for both you and your baby.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

The best approach for parents flying with infants is to start preparing early. The [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) has strict rules for air travelers, especially those with babies and children, and many airlines tack on a few of their own. Check with your carrier. It will make your trip much easier if you understand and follow the rules.

Choosing Your Flight

- Whether you are traveling alone or with children, you should prebook your flight as far in advance as possible. In addition to the cost savings, having seat assignments made and boarding passes printed off from your home computer before you leave will save lots of time and hassle when you reach the airport.
- It's not easy getting through to airlines by phone these days, but it is a good idea to call the airline you plan to use and ask questions. The best fares tend to be online, so do your research before you call. They may match the price for you, but be aware that some airlines charge a premium for booking by phone.
- Let the airline know you are traveling with an infant. They might offer a discount if you are purchasing an extra seat for the baby. You will need to reserve a window seat and bring your own FAA-approved car seat for the baby. (See "Packing" below.)
- Traveling with the baby on your lap? For safety reasons, we don't recommend this option but, if you must, consider bringing along a comfortable [baby sling](#) for added comfort and security. Be sure to check with your airline carrier first, since some restrict using these in flight.
- Although it's not all that common unless you are traveling internationally, you may still need a ticket for a baby you hold on your lap.
- Check to see if the airline will offer an infant luggage allowance. You'll need it, especially if you are bringing along a stroller. Some airlines charge a pretty hefty fee for extra checked luggage.
- Consider your baby's routine, and try to avoid connecting flights. If you are traveling internationally across time zones, you might also want to try to start adjusting your baby's schedule slowly several days before you fly.
- You might want to check the on-time records of the airlines and flights you are considering through an online tool like [FlightStats.com](#), which also offers great information about real-time airport and flight status.
- Don't panic if you aren't able to book your seats—or at least not the seats you want. Just plan to check in with the ticketing or gate agent at the airport when you get there.

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Essential Paperwork

- Make sure the baby is covered under your travel insurance.
- If you are traveling without the other parent, get written permission to do so. It's also a good idea to carry a copy of the baby's birth certificate or some other form of identification with you that proves you are the parent or legal guardian.
- When traveling outside of the U.S., you will likely need a passport for the baby. This can be a time-consuming process, so apply several weeks in advance of your trip. Visit the [U.S. Department of State](#) web site or check with your local post office on how to apply.

Packing

- Start jotting down your packing list well in advance and count on making adjustments. Last minute packing leads to lots of stress and forgotten necessities.
- For items such as clothing, food and diapers, consider whether you will have access to laundry facilities and stores at your destination, as well as the length of your stay.
- If possible, leave those bulky items at home. Check into whether you can rent strollers at your destination, and ask about getting a playard or crib when you make your hotel reservation. One exception is the car seat. Because you can't be assured of the quality and you can't always tell whether a used or rental car seat may have been damaged or in an accident, you could be putting your baby's safety at risk.
- Pack a small carry-on bag of essentials that will fit in front of your seat for easy access. Include diapers, wipes, a blanket, a change of clothes, food, and a plastic bag for trash and dirty diapers. Add some extras (especially diapers) in case of delays or cancellations, as well as a few first aid items.
- You will need to check your stroller, so bring a sturdy bag to protect it from the rest of the cargo. You can usually keep your stroller while in the airport if you want, but you may not have time to put it in its protective cover if you gate-check it. Consider checking it upon arrival at the airport and switching to a baby sling instead.
- If you are planning to use a car seat on the plane, it must be clearly labeled as [FAA approved](#) for air travel. Car seats can be cumbersome and difficult to install, and flight attendants are not allowed for liability reasons to help you. Be sure to carefully review your manufacturer's instructions before the trip.
- If you haven't purchased an extra ticket and the flight isn't full, you may be allowed to take your FAA-approved car seat onboard and use it in a spare seat.
- Plan for yourself, too! Wear shoes that you can easily slip off and on at security and loose fitting, comfortable clothes. Bring a change of clothes in case the baby makes a mess, and pack some snacks like protein bars or fruit for a healthy pick-me-up.

AT THE AIRPORT

On average, it is recommended that you arrive at the airport at least 2 hours before check-in. Depending on the airport, weather, time of day, and other variables, the time it takes you to go through security can be much shorter—or longer.

Since you will be traveling with extra "gear," do yourself a favor and give yourself the extra time. It will be much easier on you and the little one to wait awhile longer at the gate than get bogged down at security and risk missing your flight.

Checking In

Even if you printed your boarding passes at home, you will still need to check your bags. There are three ways to do this:

- Check them with a skycap, usually your quickest option. Many airports now charge a fee for this service or recommend a tip of \$2 per checked item.
- See an agent at the ticket counter. Factor in time for potential lines. This is separate from the security check-in. This is a good option if you have last minute questions, and want to get or change your seat assignment. (You can also do this at the gate if you use the skycap or self-serve.)
- Self-serve kiosks. Although these are quick and convenient when traveling light, they can be the least attractive option for traveling with a baby, because you will still be responsible for taking your own check-in luggage to the x-ray area.

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Airport Security

At this point, you are ready to pass through security, which can be one of the most frustrating aspects of air travel. Keep in mind that there are [strict rules](#) about what items are allowed through security and brought onboard the airplane.

The TSA's [web site](#) does a good job of explaining how to get through airport security with infants and children. The videos on their site are short and worth the time.

At The Gate

If you have questions or still need to change your seat assignment, get in line to talk with the gate agent. If not, use this time to fold up your stroller, prepare to place your baby in its sling, and wait for boarding instructions to be announced.

As a traveler with a small child, you will usually be given the option to board the plane before general boarding. Take advantage of this "early boarding" opportunity. It will provide you with extra time to get you, your baby and your gear settled on the plane before the rush.

There are also plenty of other great web sites that will help dissect the TSA information even further, including [JetWithKids.com](#), which even the TSA recommends.

Before you stow your carry-on under the seat, pull out a pacifier, toy and other items that you might need to soothe your baby. Sucking a pacifier can also help to relieve any ear pain your baby might experience during the flight, especially during take-off and landing.

Okay. You've made it. Now, take a deep breath and enjoy baby's first flight.

Baby Product Experts specialty stores provide safe, high-quality products and expert advice. Be sure to consult a store near you when planning a nursery for your new baby.