

→ Check In

By Dr. Laura A. Jana and Dr. Jennifer Shu



Flying the Family-Friendly Skies

Having a new baby around the house tends to make even the most routine of pre-parenthood tasks require a bit more forethought.

In this age of upward mobility, a large number of new parents find themselves faced with what we consider to be an altogether new form of travel: airplane travel with a baby. With a little knowledge and a positive attitude, you will find that you are very capable through even the most challenging aspects of what lies ahead. In this article, adapted

from our book, *Heading Home With Your Newborn*, we've included insights that apply specifically to flying with your baby.

Around the Clock

While there isn't one answer to the question of when it's easiest to travel, the fact of the matter is that newborns and young babies generally adapt pretty well to changes in sleep and eating schedules.

We have found that babies tend to sleep more reliably at nighttime than they do during naptime travel after the first few weeks. If you and your baby can sleep on the plane, a late-night flight may be the way to go.

Ticket to Ride

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does not require the purchase of an airline ticket for any child younger than 2 years. However, because turbulence is the most common cause of nonfatal injury among passengers and flight attendants, according to the FAA, adults, coffee pots, and tray tables all need to be restrained during flight — and we believe infants should be no exception. Also, many babies who would otherwise be content to sit in their car seats and entertain themselves or sleep tend to have much greater expectations about playtime when they are held.

We, therefore, suggest you look around and take advantage of the discounted seats many airlines offer for infants and strongly encourage you to save up and pay for the extra seat if at all possible. If you still find yourself looking for tips about traveling with an infant on your lap, we have some useful ones to offer:

- Choose your seat wisely. A window seat is out of the way but with less easy access to the aisle. In an aisle seat, you'll have to pay attention to a second set of body parts to make sure that heads, feet, and limbs don't get bumped by service carts or passers-by. Book the aisle and window seats. Chances are better that the middle seat will remain unoccupied.
- Consider the perks. As for the choices you do have when it comes to seat assignments, many parents vie for the opportunity to sit in the bulkhead rows located at the front of each section of the aircraft. These seats typically offer more space than is allotted between the rest of the rows.
- Play the odds. When you check in at the gate, ask the ticketing agent if there are any seats still available. If there are, chances are good that they will be middle seats, and you may be allowed to secure your infant's car seat in the window seat you had reserved for yourself.

At the Airport

Figuring out how to get everyone and everything checked in and to the gate requires some forethought. Many airlines now require that infants without a paid ticket receive a boarding pass. And, as inconvenient as it may seem, safety regulations now require that you lift your baby out of her car seat—even if your baby is sleeping contentedly.

Here are some timesaving strategies to consider:

1. Avoid the prospect of parking and get dropped off whenever possible.
2. If you do end up driving yourselves, the divide and conquer approach leaves one adult free to park while the other checks in (assuming you are not traveling solo). Be sure to set a clearly defined meeting place before parting ways.
3. Make the most of modern-day conveniences, such as rolling



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- luggage, Smarte Cartes, and your baby stroller or carrier.
4. Check baby gear at the gate so you'll have one less item to lug on board.

Baby On Board

We highly recommend dressing yourself and your child in easy-on, easy-off layers so that you are prepared for whatever in-flight conditions you may find. In making your selections, remember that easy access and comfort are key.

Simply put, elastic-waist pants, zip-up outfits, or easy-snap crotches are far easier than tights and lace-up or button-up-the-back Onesies when it comes to diaper changing — especially when faced with doing it in cramped quarters.

If everything you choose to bring along fits easily in your carry-on bags, it will significantly decrease the likelihood that you will leave a trail of belongings in your wake. That said, there are quite a few supplies that you probably won't want to board without:

- diapering supplies
- change of clothing
- favorite blanket or stuffed animal
- tissues or paper towels

First in Flight

Fortunately for all involved, many young babies actually do travel well in flight. As for ear pain caused by the change in cabin pressure, a great many babies never show the slightest sign of discomfort. It's useful to know that there is a practical and realistic alternative to gum chewing that works very well for babies when it comes to relieving ear pressure.

Offer a breast, pacifier, or bottle during takeoff and initial descent. If you must get resourceful in soothing your child, take comfort in knowing that the drone of the engines usually limits how far a crying baby can be heard. Airplane cabin noise hovers around 100 decibels, and is even louder during takeoff. Using cotton balls or small earplugs may help to decrease the decibel level your baby is exposed to, and as a result make it easier for her to sleep or relax. ●