

my kid's first... long-haul flight

These six expert tips will ensure that Junior has a comfortable start and end to his holiday.



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Book a red-eye flight To minimise disruptions to your kid's sleep schedule and make changing time zones easier to deal with, you're better off with an overnight flight, says Dr Prashba K. Agarwal, a consultant paediatrician and neonatologist at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital. Jetlag is unavoidable, but it's usually milder in kids. Just make sure that he sleeps during the flight and gets some fresh air and sunshine once you arrive.

He should try to stay physically active throughout the day, but if he is tired, a short nap in the early afternoon should do the trick. Just avoid oversleeping; otherwise, he may not be able to fall asleep at night. To help him wind down on his first night, he should have dinner and go to bed early.

Calm him down if your tot has trouble falling asleep, Dr Agarwal recommends breastfeeding him, or getting him to sip some milk during take-off. Both have a mild sedative effect.

You may also wish to play soothing music, read him a book, or sing him a lullaby to help him drift off. If your child is older, it might be a good idea to tire him out with some physical activities on the day of the flight.

A window seat on the plane will minimise any distractions, as well. To help him fall asleep easily, make sure that the window shade is pulled down and the overhead light turned off.

Keep him occupied Make the long hours enjoyable by ensuring that he has plenty to do. Colouring books, crayons, and small toys or games are a good alternative to in-flight entertainment, and can even be brought out as a surprise treat at different or difficult times, says Dr Agarwal.

Stay hydrated As long flights can be dehydrating, give him small amounts of fluid regularly, Dr Agarwal advises. Milk, water and juices are good options, although you should avoid concentrated juice, as this is high in sugar and can increase restlessness and hyperactivity.

To get an idea of his hydration status, check his diaper for wetness every now and then, or keep tabs on your older child's toilet visits.

Eat well Stick to lean protein like chicken and fish, yogurt, fruit like bananas and berries, and starches like bread and crackers.

Dr Agarwal suggests avoiding foods that are high in sugar and saturated fat. The former may cause hyperactivity in Junior, making it difficult for him to sleep.

Avoid high-sodium foods, too, as these can lead to water retention, and cruciferous vegetables, beans and carbonated drinks, as these can cause gassiness and abdominal discomfort.

Don't worry about DVT Deep-vein thrombosis is not a problem that affects healthy children, Dr Agarwal explains. However, certain kids with underlying medical conditions such as malignancy or thrombophilia, or those who are still recovering from major surgery, are at a higher risk of developing DVT during a long flight, so seek medical advice. ☺