



# USA WEEKEND

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# Health

## Catching a flight? Don't catch a cold

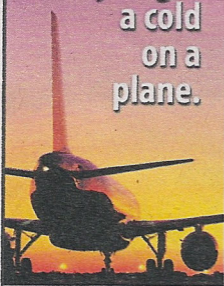
**F**LYING HOME for the holidays? You are up to 113 times more likely to leave the airplane with a cold than if you had stayed on

the ground, according to a University of Victoria, Canada, study.

And, if you already have a cold when you board, it'll probably get worse. "Pressure differences during the flight plug up your inner ears and sinuses," says Neil Schachter, M.D., author of *The Good*

*Doctor's Guide to Colds and Flu*, "so when you step off the plane feeling terrible, you're not imagining it."

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### 4 ways to avoid airplane colds

**REDUCE PRESSURE EFFECTS.** Take an antihistamine if you have any sign of a cold, Schachter says. Decongestants work but can raise blood pressure.

**STAY HYDRATED.** To keep mucus membranes working despite dry cabin air, sip water throughout the flight (hot drinks are especially effective, but avoid caffeine) and use a saline nasal spray.

**MINIMIZE CONTACT.** You catch more colds by touching than by breathing, says Schachter, so don't borrow your neighbor's pen! Do wash your hands frequently and use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. More than 200 viruses (not bacteria) cause the common cold, so antibacterial products won't help.

**PACK PROTECTION.** Zinc lozenges can reduce a cold's symptoms and duration, but use only one or two, Schachter advises, lest you lose your sense of taste or smell. Vitamin C can't prevent a cold, but it's a natural antihistamine that relieves symptoms without sleepiness. Chicken soup provides comfort and inhibits inflammation. 

— Susan T. Lennon