

Protect Yourself From Illness This Travel Season

We're coming up on one of the busiest travel seasons of the year.

Many of us will be traveling to visit friends and relatives over the holidays, while others will be taking advantage of the holiday period to enjoy a vacation. Each scenario affords the opportunity



Dr. David Williams

to relax, unwind, and take a needed break from the normal routine. Unfortunately, though, travel very often results in illness.

There are two primary reasons for this. With a little knowledge and foresight, you can take some simple preventive steps to ensure traveling doesn't ruin your vacation and/or holiday.

Exposure to Pathogens

One cause of travel-related sickness stems from an increase in the exposure to pathogenic viruses, bacteria, and parasites. The more people and different environments you're exposed to, the greater the risk of becoming sick.

If you've had children in day-care or school, you know what I'm talking about. Kids, with their developing immune systems, are notorious for contracting just

about every contagious respiratory infection going around. Enclosed environments make it almost impossible to completely avoid contact with infected individuals or contaminated air and/or surfaces.

Travel can significantly increase these types of exposures. And mass transportation equates to massive exposure to pathogens. Breathing recycled air on aircraft has undoubtedly received most of the attention, but in reality, mass transportation of any sort is filled with germs.

The air quality on aircraft has been systematically improved over the years. Hospital-quality HEPA filters are now utilized, and they're capable of removing 94–99 percent of all airborne microbes. Humidity levels are better controlled and fresh air is constantly being mixed with recirculated air, resulting in a complete change-over of air every two to three minutes. That rate of filtering and exchange is something that has never been achieved in other public spaces like classrooms, offices, or movie theaters.

In actuality, you're more likely to become ill on an airplane if infected passengers are sitting near you. But an even greater risk of infection probably comes from physical

contact with specific areas of a commercial aircraft that tend to always be covered in germs.

Studies have shown that tray tables and lavatory flush buttons are loaded with bacteria. And let's not forget those germ-filled seatback pockets and the magazines they store, which constantly come into contact with diapers, used tissues, vomit, and God knows what else.

Minimize Your Exposure to Germs

Here are a few suggestions that can help minimize your exposure to these illness-causing germs.

1. Use mentholatum. Before your flight, prior to boarding the plane, rub a small amount of mentholatum ointment between your upper lip and nostrils, and even a little inside your nostrils. Vicks VapoRub would also work, but I prefer mentholatum.

On longer domestic or international flights, I reapply the mentholatum every three to four hours. It helps me breathe and sleep better and, to a degree, I think it can help trap airborne pathogens before they can enter the respiratory tract.

Although mentholatum and Vicks VapoRub have been used in this manner for 130 years and 114

years, respectively, in just the last few years some people have questioned whether the oil potentially draining from the nostrils into the lungs might cause pneumonia. They also question if it is really effective in opening up nasal passages or if it just “fools” the nervous system into making you mistakenly believe you can breathe better.

As a result, neither product prints claims of being helpful with stuffy noses, sore throats, or the like. Labels also now say not to put it in or under the nostrils or on the neck or chest. They also warn not to use it on children aged 2 or younger.

It should be noted that the study that warns about Vicks VapoRub was performed on ferrets. Furthermore, other studies on children have reported that those with cold symptoms and treated with VapoRub slept better and had an easier time breathing throughout the night, compared to children given a placebo rub.

Personally, my family and I have used mentholatum for decades without incident. I don't ingest or overuse it, and I believe it's an effective remedy for improving breathing, alleviating chest congestion, and capturing airborne pathogens before they can enter

the respiratory system and cause illness or infection.

2. Avoid touching anything in the lavatory. Use a paper towel to flush. Wash your hands thoroughly before exiting and open the door with the towel you use to dry your hands. Speaking of washing your hands, it may be one of the most important things you can do. Keeping children's hands clean during travel is even more important. Kids are notorious for putting whatever they can in their mouth, and most pathogens enter the body through the nose and mucus membranes surrounding the mouth or eyes.

3. Do not touch the seatback pocket. If you can, avoid storing things in and touching the seatback pocket.

4. Wipe down the tray table. If you're going to utilize the tray table—especially for holding food or drinks—cleaning it with a sanitizing wet wipe is a smart idea.

You should heed these recommendations whenever you travel on any form of public transportation, use public restrooms, and stay in hotels. You wouldn't be wrong if you considered all of these places microbial cesspools—because they are. When do you think the television remote control in a hotel room was last sanitized? (Probably

never.) On the surface, things may look clean but they can still be teeming with microbes.

It goes without saying, this is especially true in Third World countries. And the variety of pathogenic microbes has only increased with travelers coming from every part of planet.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not a germaphobe. You won't see me disinfecting everything in sight or avoiding a handshake, but in this day and age, it has become necessary to take a few precautions. Arriving at your destination with the flu, “tourista,” or something worse can ruin what little leisure time you have.

If your travels take you out of the country, the list of necessary precautions may increase depending on the exact destination, local issues, length of the trip, what you will be doing there, etc. As a general rule, food and water contamination are responsible for the majority of problems in these areas.

We're fortunate that in most places, we can safely drink water out of a garden hose or even the reservoir that holds toilet water. It's the same water that comes out of the faucet. That's not the case in many areas around the world. If you're traveling internationally, I strongly suggest checking

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government websites like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for current health notices.

Weakened Immune System

The second primary cause of travel-related sickness stems from a weakened immune system.

Stress (which can be good *or* bad) impairs our immune response. By “good” stress, I’m referring to the excitement and anticipation of going on a vacation, which often creates an ongoing adrenal “rush.” This adrenal rush can impair the immune system the same as bad stress or anxiety. Any kind of stress increases the production and release of the hormone cortisol.

Cortisol dampens the inflammatory response from our immune system that is needed to destroy pathogens that enter the body. In simple terms, this means cortisol suppresses the effectiveness of the immune system. Travel-induced stress can give pathogens a window of opportunity to enter and proliferate within the body.

Other factors that can cause stress during travel, weaken the

immune system, and lead to illness include:

- **Altering your eating schedule and consuming different foods than you normally do.**
 - **Constipation—which is very common during travel. Normal routines and bowel habits get disrupted and can increase toxic waste material and place additional burdens on the liver, kidneys, and immune system.**
 - **Disruption in routine vitamin/supplement and medication intake.**
 - **Changes in temperature/humidity.**
 - **Excessive sun exposure.**
 - **Dehydration—which usually comes from drinking less water and often, more alcohol.**
 - **A totally unstructured itinerary—for some, too many choices results in additional stress.**
 - **Exposure to different microbes that your body isn’t accustomed to.**
 - **Changing time zones, which disrupts the circadian rhythm. Most people think that jet lag only happens on longer flights, but in reality, our bodies can only adjust to 1–1.5 hours of time change per day.**
- If you have a longer flight planned, start to adjust your circadian rhythm ahead of the flight. A few days before the trip, gradually**

start shifting your eating, sleeping, exercise, and activity habits to the new time zone. And don’t forget to limit light exposure. It may require going to bed a little earlier or later. Use a sleep mask to simulate darkness, and take a dose of melatonin.

Once you board your flight, adhere to the time at your final destination. Instead of watching movies or staying up, make sure you go to sleep at same time you would if you were already at your destination.

- **Disrupted sleep patterns. Studies have repeatedly shown that less sleep results in a higher risk of contracting colds and flu. Adhering to your regular sleeping hours and utilizing melatonin (as mentioned above) to help acclimate to a new area can help prevent illness. When you get up in the morning, open the blinds or go outside and allow the sunlight to reset your biological clock to the time of your new location.**
- **Lack of exercise. Exercise relaxes and “boosts” the effectiveness of the immune system. It’s not something that has to be overdone on a vacation. Something as simple as walking daily can help.**
- **Guilt from not working—Although most people can’t comprehend how relaxing can cause guilt, it’s a problem I personally have.**

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Supplements to Prevent Travel Sickness

In addition to melatonin, there are other supplements that can be very helpful in averting sickness when you travel. In fact, many of these important nutrients should be part of your daily supplement regimen, whether you travel or not.

Probiotics

Probiotics (and, if possible, fermented foods) are at the top of this list. It's hard to overstress their importance when it comes to overall health and prevention. The more varied and robust your gut microbiome is, the better it is able to protect against pathogens.

A Multi Plus Extra Nutrients

A daily multivitamin/mineral that includes digestive enzymes and naturally antibiotic compounds like turmeric and vitamins C and D is also important.

Your body uses digestive enzymes to destroy pathogens that enter the GI tract. If your travels take you to areas of the world where sanitation is below par and/or you have no choice but to consume questionable foods, then I highly recommend bringing along separate digestive enzymes and taking them with each and every meal. Natural extracts of pineapple, papaya, and mango are very inexpensive. In many tropical locations, these fresh fruits are readily available and can be consumed with meals as well.

Vitamins C and D are both known immune boosters, and two of the oldest recorded uses of turmeric happen to be for stomach upset and diarrhea. (It should be noted, though, that excessive doses of turmeric, like practically

anything else, may cause diarrhea.) Another option is turmeric tea (Golden Milk). It's a great way to enjoy the anti-inflammatory, gut-soothing benefits of turmeric.

Ume Plum Concentrate

Finally, I'm not sure if there's one item that can totally prevent travel-related illnesses, but *ume plum concentrate* may come pretty close.

I learned about ume plum concentrate years ago while traveling in Japan. While the concentrate is used medicinally there, children and adults alike have almost an addiction to these "salt plums."

I personally am not particularly attracted to the very salty, sour treats, but after seeing how well the concentrate works medicinally, I'm shocked that it remains relatively unknown in this country. This is especially puzzling considering all the research that has been published on this fruit.

The Japanese were introduced to the ume plums through Buddhist teachings, and since then it has become commonplace in the diet and within healing circles. It has been a favorite "tonic" in the Japanese culture for thousands of years.

Research has shown that ume plum helps alkalize the intestinal tract, improve overall digestion, increase the absorption of minerals, and reduce the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*, which is associated with chronic stomach inflammation and gastric ulcers. As such, many people in Japan use ume to alleviate symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Ume plum concentrate also can help protect against the flu, either at home or during travel. In the

1900s, ume plum extract was so revered, it was issued to Japanese soldiers and sailors for the express purpose of preventing both dysentery and motion sickness.

Compounds in the concentrate appear to bind to flu viruses in the bloodstream, preventing them from infecting the host. However, one study found that it is only protective if it is in the system before exposure to the virus. It didn't appear to have any effect on lessening flu symptoms after one had already contracted flu. (*Biol Pharm Bull* 2008 Mar;31(3):511-5)

Eden Foods (edenfoods.com) sells an ume plum concentrate and also a less potent product called Ume Plum Balls. The suggested daily dose is around 15 of these small little BB-like pills.

Personally, I like the Mitoku Ume Concentrate from Natural Import Company (naturalimport.com). This company is a great source for numerous high-quality Japanese food products. The suggested daily dose of the concentrate is roughly one gram, which works out to 40 doses in a 1.4 ounce jar.

What Happens If You Still Get Sick?

Sometimes, despite our very best efforts to prevent illness, a bug manages to grab hold of us. Here are things you can do to ease the misery and shorten the duration of the malady.

Motion Sickness

For motion sickness during all kinds of travel (car, bus, train, plane, ship, etc.), you can't beat ginger root powder capsules. The trick is to either take a couple of

capsules before embarking, or at the very first sign of any problem.

Studies have shown that ginger root is as effective as Dramamine (dimenhydrinate) for treating nausea and vomiting, if not more so. And it works without the side effects of Dramamine.

Colds and Flu

Vitamin C/zinc lozenges can be a godsend at the first sign of a cold, flu, or upper respiratory infection. There are dozens of these products on the market. I have these lozenges on hand at home and always pack them when traveling. It's amazing how quickly a sore throat can be knocked out when caught early.

Elderberry extract is another favorite of mine. I've written extensively on the research detailing how this extract is effective at eliminating viruses in the respiratory tract and preventing or shortening colds and flu. Now there's even a product by [Nature's Way called Organic Sambucus Elderberry, Vitamin C, and Zinc Lozenges](#) that gives you the best of everything. Even better, it is raspberry flavored. It's great for both kids and adults, and it's quickly becoming my "go to" lozenge.

Intestinal Distress

The first thing I would do in the case of intestinal distress is address the ileocecal valve.

I've talked about the ileocecal valve many times in the past. If the only thing you ever learned from reading *Alternatives* was how to correct a problem with the ileocecal valve, you could very well become a miracle-performing superhero to your family and friends.

This little valve is located between the small and large intestine, in the same area as the appendix. It has two very important jobs. First, it blocks the toxic contents of the large intestine from backing up into the small intestine. Second, it keeps the food products in the small intestine from passing into the large intestine before digestive processes are completed.

When the ileocecal valve isn't working right, it can cause many symptoms, including:

- **Diarrhea**
- **Constipation**
- **Flu-like symptoms**
- **Lightheadedness**
- **Nausea**
- **Ringings in the ears**
- **Shoulder, low back, or hip pain**
- **Sinus infections**
- **Chest pain**
- **Heart flutters**
- **Headaches**

The valve can at times become stuck...either shut or open.

When the valve sticks shut—In its normal course, food moves through the small intestine and into the large intestine, then gets expelled from the body. When the valve sticks shut, feces are unable to move past the small intestine. The small intestine's main job is to absorb, and it keeps right on reabsorbing all of the waste products that were destined to be expelled. Also, with the valve shut and the food backing up, you become constipated.

When the valve sticks open—By sticking open, not only does food move through you rapidly

(to say the least), waste products in the large intestine can back up into the small intestine and again be reabsorbed into your body. The result is diarrhea.

There are several reasons the valve may not work right: consuming excessive spicy or roughage-type foods; stress or emotional trauma; and having had your appendix removed.

Fortunately, there are some easy ways to help stabilize the ileocecal valve.

Things to Do for Both Open and Closed Valves

1. Eliminate spicy foods for a week or so.
2. Take garlic oil softgels, two with each meal, for two or three days. This will speed up the elimination of any harmful pathogens and toxins that have set up house in the small intestine and/or colon. Liquid chlorophyll works as well, but garlic oil capsules are easier to find, and if they aren't available, you can find raw garlic practically everywhere. Start with half a small clove of raw, crushed garlic with each meal and work up to one small clove per meal for a few days.

A few notes on garlic products... If using it as a preventive prior to a trip, I suggest using Kyolic Formula 102, which contains both aged garlic and digestive enzymes. If treating an existing problem, I recommend straight garlic oil, like the product from NOW Foods, which contains garlic oil concentrate in convenient softgels.

3. Eliminate alcohol, cocoa, chocolate, and caffeine.

(continued on page 7)



Do Kids Need Probiotics?

Question: *After learning about probiotics from you, I've been taking them faithfully for years. I have young children and I would like to know if you think they should also be taking probiotics. —K.V., Stilwell, KS*

Answer: Short answer, yes.

It seems like every week, I learn about a new study that links a child's future health to their microbiome. In many respects, the variety of species and balance of microflora in an infant and child may have a greater impact on their future health than that of an adult.

A tremendous amount of research is presently focused on childhood obesity. Currently, one in three children in the United States is overweight or obese. As you know, obesity at an early age sets one up for a lifetime of potential health problems such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Establishing and maintaining the proper bacterial flora in the body at an early age can help prevent all of these issues.

As I've discussed many times in the past, a single round of antibiotic therapy disrupts the bacterial balance in the gut for as long as a year. It shifts the balance in favor of bacterial strains that lead to excess fat storage and obesity. This is precisely why producers of cattle, chicken, and other meat include antibiotics in their animal feed.

A large European study recently found that probiotics significantly reduce the need for antibiotics in children, and reduce the incidence, duration, and severity of many common types of acute respiratory and gastrointestinal infections. ([Euro J Pub Health 2018 Sep 14. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cky185](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cky185))

Other studies have found that probiotics can also reduce the incidence of colic, intestinal distress, and even skin conditions like eczema.

In another study released in September, researchers found that common household disinfectants disrupt children's gut microflora and increase their risk of becoming overweight. The status of more than 750 infants was followed for roughly three years. During this period, researchers learned about their exposure to household cleaning products and disinfectants. They also looked at changes in microbes in their feces, and what effect those changes had on their risk of being overweight in the future. Profiles began when the infants were 3 to 4 months old.

By the time they reached 3 years of age, the stool samples of those children regularly exposed to cleaning products and disinfectants showed a significant shift toward bacterial species associated with obesity. Researchers found that the higher the exposure, the higher the odds of the child being overweight or obese. The use of eco-friendly products (like vinegar) was associated with decreased odds of being overweight or obese. ([CMAJ Sept. 17, 2018 190\(37\)](#))

And yet another study has just shown that a child's oral microbiota at age 2 is related to how much weight they gain during their first two years of life.

Normally, when you hear about oral microbiota, it is in relation to periodontal disease (which, by the way, has also been linked to an increased risk of obesity). This latest study, however, found that the less diverse the oral bacteria in a child, the greater the risk of being obese at age 2. This study is unique because by the age of 2, the gut microbiota generally isn't completely established and is still going through changes.

Even more interesting was that the diversity of oral bacteria in these children was found to reflect that of the mother. They believe this is because both the diet and the environment of the mother and child were similar. It appears that if the mother isn't eating a healthy, varied diet that supplies prebiotics (fresh fruits and vegetables) and probiotic fermented foods, the child probably is lacking those as well. From a prevention standpoint, these latest findings are further evidence of just how critical a role dental hygiene, oral bacteria, and oral probiotics play in our health. ([Scientific Reports 8, Article number: 14030 \(2018\)](#))

As I've explained before, the inoculation and colonization of a child's microflora begins during the birth process. The baby's lips, anus, nose, and eyes are

all exposed to the mother's bacterial flora. Once born, breastfeeding is by far the optimal method of introducing and nourishing these beneficial strains of bacteria. This is why breastfed infants typically don't need probiotics during this period of life. The need obviously changes, however, if the baby takes any antibiotics.

Once the child begins to consume solid foods, you can enhance their bacterial flora with both prebiotic and probiotic foods like live yogurt, kefir, bananas, onions, artichokes, apple skins, sourdough bread, and cheese. (Kefir or yogurt blended with pineapple chunks or frozen bananas, or kefir/yogurt and fruit frozen popsicles are easy to make. If dairy poses

a problem in the beginning, try using coconut milk instead.)

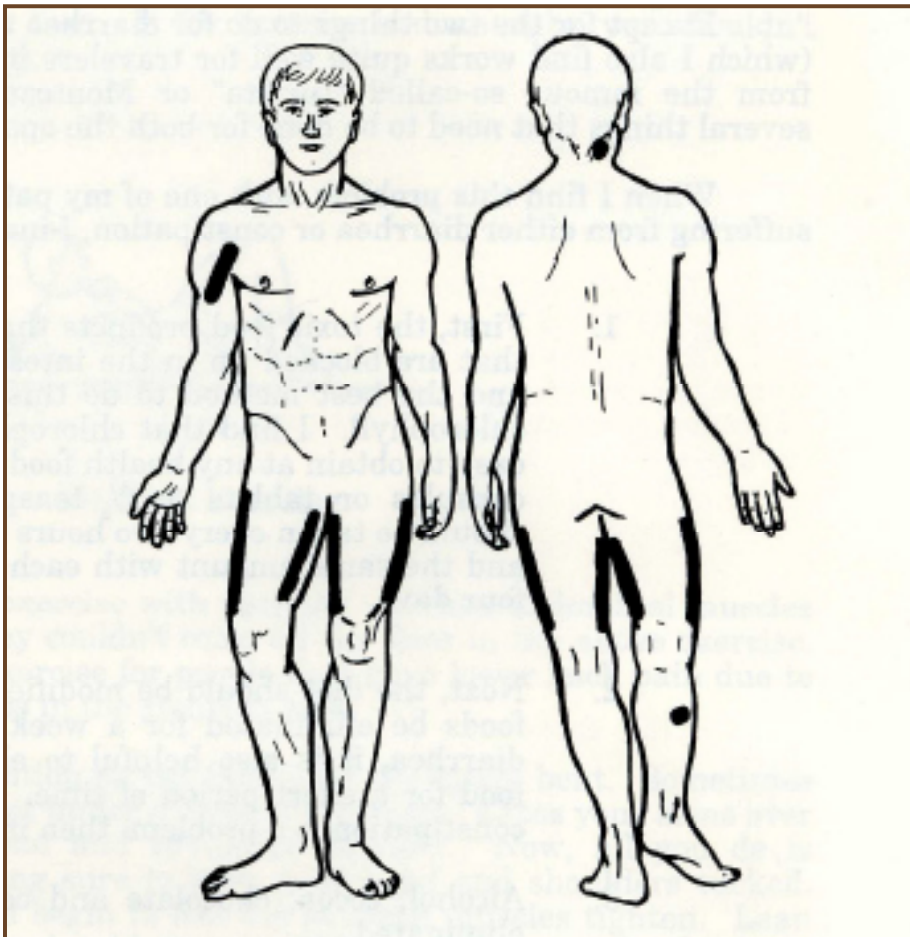
The gradual introduction of higher-fiber foods and vegetables helps support healthy gut flora in young children. As they get older, actual probiotics formulated for infants and children are now available in drops, powders, and chewable tablets.

In the near future, I believe there will be a tremendous focus on the need to establish and balance the bacterial flora in infants and young children. Research has confirmed this is a period when the immune system is developing and the outcome has a significant influence on one's development and health for many decades to follow.

4. Most importantly, use acupressure to manipulate specific points and reflex areas. Doing this will often provide almost immediate relief from the symptoms of either an open or closed valve, and help it function normally again.

Oftentimes you'll actually hear a "gurgling" sound in the area of the valve after manipulating these points. And it's not unusual to experience a noticeable improvement within half an hour or so.

The areas highlighted in the illustration below need to be massaged with firm pressure for about 10 to 20 seconds—but longer than that can negate any beneficial effect. However, you can manipulate these areas every 30 to 60 minutes, if necessary, until the problem is under control.



Additional Things to Do for a Closed Valve

If the problem is constipation, increase roughage. Gradually include more fermented foods. Digestive enzymes may be needed, along with foods rich in natural digestive enzymes like pineapple, papaya, and mango.

Also add extra calcium and vitamin D to your diet. Moderate sunlight exposure can help increase vitamin D levels.

Additional Things to Do for an Open Valve

If the problem is diarrhea, eliminate all roughage-type foods for a short time. Add lactic acid yeast wafers or a probiotic to the diet. Either of these products alone

can sometimes stop even the most stubborn cases of chronic diarrhea.

With chronic diarrhea, the colon can become inflamed and sensitive to almost anything. The soluble fiber pectin can help, providing a temporary protective coating. Apple pectin is one example. Eating applesauce or a peeled, cored apple that has been pureed in a blender every couple of hours is an easy way to get pectin. Typically, under-ripe Granny Smith apples contain the most pectin, but bananas are also a fairly good source.

There are a couple other tricks when the valve is stuck open. First, you can sometimes hold the valve shut for several minutes. Place your hand over the valve—located about halfway between the belly button and the right hip bone—and, while pushing in, pull up toward the left shoulder. The second way is to place an ice pack over the valve for 15 to 20 minutes. Either of these processes can be repeated if necessary.

If the diarrhea has been persistent, rehydration and mineral replacement is needed. (Keep in mind that, because of fluid/mineral loss, diarrhea can get dangerous very quickly in infants and children. In severe cases, get medical attention as quickly as possible.)

In short-term, milder cases of diarrhea, I've found that soups, broths, saltine crackers, and carbonated water (unsweetened sparkling water) usually work just fine.

An over-the-counter product to replace electrolytes called [Ultima Replenisher](#) also works well. (Many people find it helpful

following a night of excessive alcohol consumption.) It comes in several flavors and mixes with water.

Coconut water is also helpful for rehydration and replacing electrolytes. In more severe cases, you can always use the simple, tried, true, and tested oral rehydration formula that has worked for decades around the globe. It was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to save the lives of children and infants with dysentery in developing countries. In those areas, diarrhea is one of the leading causes of infant mortality.

The ingredients to the WHO formula can be found just about everywhere, and it is extremely easy to make:

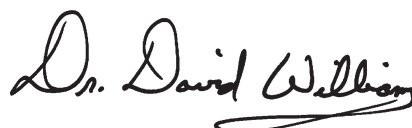
- 5 cups of clean water
- 6 teaspoons of sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt

If you have the means and available ingredients, a more complete formula can be made using:

- one quart of boiled (or distilled/purified) water
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons of honey or 2 1/2 tablespoons of sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon of salt
- 1/4 teaspoon of potassium chloride (i.e., salt substitute)
- 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda

I hope this information helps get you through holiday travel season safely. Happy Thanksgiving!

Until next month,



This Month Online

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