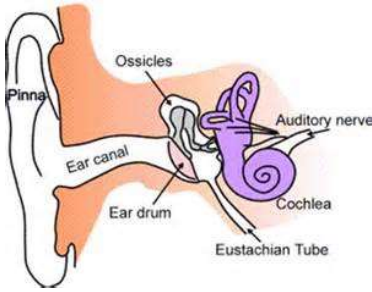


Asthma & Allergy Physicians of Rhode Island

PREVENTING EAR AND SINUS PAIN WHILE FLYING

This information is intended to help you understand more about the ear or sinus pain that you may be concerned with or experience on an upcoming airplane flight.

First, let us explain how ear pain can occur when the plane descends for landing. There is a tube that connects the back of your throat to the area just behind your eardrum that is called the Eustachian tube. Its function is to equalize the pressure in the air behind your eardrum with the air around you. Due to inflammation or infection, swelling around the tube can occur causing the Eustachian tube to not function properly.



Air pressure is not able to equalize behind the eardrum, causing ear pain as the eardrum adjusts to the abnormal pressure changes. When the pressure equalizes behind the eardrum we frequently say that the ears have "popped."

Normally when the plane is taking off and ascending, ear pain is not a problem because air can easily escape from the behind the eardrum, through the Eustachian tube and into the throat. However, when the plane descends, air must be forced through the congested Eustachian tube into the area behind the eardrum, which can be more difficult. Therefore, ear pain will almost always be experienced on descent if there is any problem at all.

Second, when the nose is congested, the passageways between the nose and the sinus cavities can be swollen as well. Once again, it may be very difficult to equalize pressure between the sinuses and the nose when descending, leading to sinus pain.

Here are a few helpful hints to hopefully make your next flight more enjoyable:

- Use Afrin nasal decongestant. Spray twice into each nostril one hour prior to flying. Also take a decongestant, like Sudafed, one hour before the flight. Both of these medications can be purchased over-the-counter in a drugstore.
- As the plane descends you will want to force air into your Eustachian tube, to equalize the pressure as the plane descends. You can do this by closing your mouth tightly and pinching your nose (to prevent air from escaping) as you blow your nose with **gentle** force. It's good to do this when you just begin to feel the pressure building up in your ears. If you wait until the pressure is severe, then you may not be able to blow hard enough to overcome the negative pressure that has built up.
- Sometimes swallowing without blowing your nose can achieve the same goal of equalization of the ear pressure making the previous maneuver unnecessary.
- Chewing gum or sucking a liquid through a straw is also helpful.
- For infants: the child should be given a bottle to drink as the plane descends in order to clear their ear pressure with the act of swallowing. This feeding should start as the plane starts to head downward or as soon as you begin to feel pressure build in your own ears. Crying will also help to clear the Eustachian tube and equalize the ear pressure.
- Before giving an infant any decongestants, discuss this matter with your pediatrician.





We hope that this information helps you fly without ear or sinus pain. Our goal is to keep you well informed so that you may avoid any discomfort associated with flying.

PLEASE NOTE: If possible, we recommend that you do not fly if your nose is congested from a cold or allergies. In the **most severe case**, this may lead to a permanent decrease in your hearing, prolonged dizziness or severe pain. Most patients who experience a decrease in hearing associated with severe pain after a flight have a readily reversible hearing loss and should be seen by an otolaryngologist (ENT) within in days of the event, as this makes it easier to correct the problem.

These information sheets are intended for use by our patients in conjunction with regular care from AAPRI. Use of these sheets by others can lead to a delay in diagnosis with potential worsening of health. If you are not one of our patients, please schedule an appointment so that we can help you to feel better as soon as possible.