

Q: We travel frequently, but it seems it gets more difficult to go by air any more. I know we're getting older and maybe have less patience, but the situation now seems more frustrating than ever. Do you have any advice for what we can do to make the check-in, security and time in airport waiting rooms any less stressful?



A: We just returned from a flight yesterday that was four hours late in taking off from Fort Lauderdale, causing us to miss our connecting flight in Las Vegas and then we had to beg the stone-faced airline desk clerk there to get us on the next available flight home. If you had asked me the question about finding such stuff less stressful last night, my answer would have been HELL, NO!

However, after cooling off a bit and knowing there's not much we can do about airport delays and all the other stresses of flying today, here are just a few suggestions.

1. Get plenty of rest before you go to the airport. Too many of us book a 7 am flight, requiring getting up at 4 am. This added to the fact that you stayed up packing your bags until 1 am will send you to the airport with just a couple of hours' sleep and as gumpy as a grizzly caught in a trap. Then, whatever happens at the airport, no matter how trivial, your exhaustion will send you into a fit of self-destructive anger.
2. I'm not a drinker, except for two special occasions. First, when I feel a cold coming on, I take a half-shot of brandy. Second, just before I get the limo to the airport, I drink the same magic medication. It works better than any pills or prescriptions to calm me down. By the time I'm in my airline seat, I'm ready to pull my cap down over my eyes and snooze.
3. Be prepared to ease some of the airport hassle. Make sure you have your boarding pass and ID card ready to show before going through security and when boarding your flight. Keep everything you'll need in handy, easy-to-reach outer and inner pockets of your coat, including cell phones and any electronic gizmos for the flight. Wear sensible, slip-on shoes when you go through security. Be familiar with all the routines, so you won't be fumbling and mumbling when you need to do something quickly.

4. If you're flying Southwest or other airline with no pre-assigned seats, print out your boarding pass by computer exactly 23.9 hours before your scheduled flight. That way you won't have to worry about getting it at the airport, and your chances of boarding early with a low-number A ticket are better.

5. The waiting and delays are the most frustrating aspects of flying, if you don't count getting your bag searched and your body frisked in security. I find the way to make time pass more quickly is to ignore it and so something to keep my mind busy. If you sit there and look at your watch every five minutes, time drags interminably. However, in addition to reading, listening to CDs, banging on my laptop, I find crossword puzzles seem to be the best to speed up the clock. I clip them from the morning newspapers, and every time I fly, I have a dozen or so with me to complete. The secret, if there is one, is to try to overcome your anxiety and impatience by distracting yourself with something interesting and/or entertaining.

No, no. That wasn't your flight they just announced, old friend. Yours is still caught in fog over Pittsburgh and won't get here for at least another two hours. Now, what's a 12-letter word that begins with frus and ends with tion which means that damn flight is late again.