

I haven't had the unique pleasure of flying with babies for more than a generation. My kids are all grown up and fighting their air combat missions with their own little flight companions. However, as a frequent flyer through the years, first about once a month for business, and now as a retiree about once every other month, I'm still quite familiar with the problem.

In fact, recently I had the great displeasure of being in the middle seat of a five-across row of sardine-sized tourist seats on an overseas flight. The ordeal is bad enough when the squeezed traveler can snooze peacefully or watch movies in the discomfort of the narrow seat. However, it was my luck to share my row with a distraught mother and three busy little gremlins.

Naturally, with my grey hair and smiling (or was it grimacing?) face, two of the kids, aged three and four, decided I should be their pretend-grandfather for the nine hours from New York to London. The other child, aged about 18 months, was content to stay in his mother's arms, except for several times when he decided to throw up in my direction.

Have I any tips on air travel with kids? Of course, I do. The first is: keep them the hell away from me. All right, flying mothers of America, I withdraw that nasty old man's gripe. I love kids, but like annoying adults, they can make flights miserable. If you at least try to be considerate of other flyers, maybe my tips will help.



1. On another overseas flight, there was a mother with an infant in my row of seats, which was the first five-across behind a straight-wall bulkhead. The airline had thoughtfully provided a row of hooks with small net hammocks on the wall.

The mother put the infant in the hammock for several hours, and like the motion of a ship, the gentle swaying of the airplane seemed to lull the baby to sleep and contentment in the papoose sling for most of the eight hours. Young mother: before you take your seat assignment, check with the airline to see if that bulkhead hammock and/or other such convenience is available for your baby in immediate front of your seat.

2. Make sure you prepare your baby's needs as thoroughly as possible before you board that airplane. First, if it will be a long flight, especially if a red-eye (overnight), try to keep your baby to the regular daily sleep-wake cycles, so that once settled in your seats, your baby should be comfortable enough to fall asleep, as would happen at home. The airline will provide pillows and blankets, and the flight attendants will offer help, including dimming the lights and warming up bottles.

3. Take all necessary baby toys, pacifiers, clothing, diapers, finger foods, liquids and, if necessary, medical supplies. Check with your pediatrician before your flight, and if he feels it may be necessary, bring prescription sleep aids.

4. If possible, although you may be a single parent, try to arrange to travel with another person, especially if the flight requires stops to change airplanes. If you're traveling alone with your baby, ask the flight attendant for help when you must take care of your own personal needs, such as for bathroom breaks. If the flight is longer than several hours, ask for relief time just to get up from your seat for a short stroll and stretch.

If nearby passengers on the flight or in the terminal volunteer to help, that should be welcomed with gratitude. However, it is usually unfair to ask for help from other passengers who just happen to be sitting nearby. Your baby is your own responsibility, and at all times, including your most stressful, and at all times you should recognize the rights of other passengers.

5. If your baby is fussy or cries continually during the flight, for the sake of calming the child and for the comfort of nearby passengers, get up and take your baby to the back of the airplane, away from the seating areas. A favorite toy, a bottle, a snack, a teething ring, and some soothing mother love should help relieve the situation

*Submitted by Jay C., Oklahma City OK*