

# When Motion Sickness Slows You Down

By Jennifer Leslie

As we head into summer, camping and resort season, and hitting the open road, what can you do if someone in your family is prone to motion (car) sickness?

The stress and unpleasantness for everyone in the family if a member is habitually sick while in transit, can limit how far from home you are able to go, and what you are able to do. Since he was five years old, the youngest member of my family has had a tendency to be motion sick, and so we rarely drove for more than two hours, or flew more than three. As soon as he starts turning pale, yawning, and getting sleepy in the car or on the plane, I know the vomiting is sure to follow.

Motion sickness, which primarily affects children between ages two and twelve years old, occurs when conflicting signals are sent to the brain from the inner ears, eyes, and sensory nerves in the extremities. Symptoms usually start with excessive yawning, salivation, sleepiness, and pallor, leading to dizziness and cold sweats, and eventually vomiting. Preventing motion sickness is the best treatment since once the symptoms set in, it is generally too late to stop.

But go ahead and plan that family road trip this summer because there are remedies for motion sickness, tried and tested by my own family, that work. These include:

- Avoid unpleasant or strong smells, including (and especially) perfume.
- Stay cool, sit out of direct sunlight, with fresh air blowing on you, if possible.
- Avoid eating spicy, fatty, or processed foods before and during the trip. Dry crackers may calm a queasy stomach.
- Keep your head still, breathe deeply, and look at a stationary object outside the vehicle.
- Avoid reading or using devices.



- There is a psychological component to motion sickness, so use “mind over matter” – tell yourself you will not get sick.
- With a physician’s advice, take anti-nausea medication (children’s dosages are available) with dimenhydrinate before you travel. For severe cases, you may wish to consider a scopolamine patch, by prescription.
- If traveling by car, sit in the front seat facing forward; if by plane, sit in a seat over the front edge of the wing.

Queasy travelers will appreciate frequent opportunities to get out of the vehicle and breathe some fresh air, so factor extra time for such “pit stops” when planning your trip. Singing, conversation, and word games can be done while looking out the window, and provide pleasant distractions from thinking about feeling sick. Perhaps the best tip is be prepared: have a supply of sturdy plastic “sick” bags handy. Family trips must be practical, as well as fun. Knowing you are ready to handle the worst symptoms of motion sickness will alleviate stress (and make dealing with messes far easier) for everyone.

Hit the road with enthusiasm and confidence this summer, even if a member of your family is prone to motion sickness. Learn some catchy songs, leave the devices at home, keep some plastic bags handy “just in case,” and you’re ready to go.

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## Motion Sickness and Canines

The same remedies listed largely apply to our canine members of the family, who also show motion sickness with excessive yawning, salivating, sleepiness, and vomiting. Dogs may also whine, drool, urinate, defecate, and act afraid to move. (Thankfully, children are not likely to do this.) As with children, young dogs are more prone to motion sickness, and may eventually outgrow it. Until they do, keep the vehicle window down a few inches while traveling to balance the air pressure and provide cool, fresh air. Encourage your dog to sit still and face forward, rather than look out a side window. Specially designed dog seatbelts are available for this.

If your dog associates rides in the car with stress, such as going to the vet, or with being sick, he or she will likely need to be reconditioned. Take a one- or two- week break from car rides, and start the training spending time with your dog in the vehicle with the engine off. Give your dog a special toy that stays only in the car, or a treat while sitting in the car with you. Then take short trips to parks and other enjoyable places. Your dog will start to associate car rides with positive feelings, reducing fear and anxiety. You can gradually build up to longer rides. If your dog doesn’t respond to the training or outgrow motion sickness, medication is available from your vet.



### SOURCES:

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“Healthy Dogs: Dogs and Motion Sickness” at [www.pets.webmed.com](http://www.pets.webmed.com).

“Motion Sickness: First Aid” at [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org).

“Motion Sickness in Dogs” at [www.vetstreet.com](http://www.vetstreet.com).