

Travel advice following a head injury



Scottish Trauma Network,
North of Scotland Trauma Unit

Travel advice following a head injury

NHSH cannot advise on the safety of flying after brain injury as there is no set rule on this and will depend on personal circumstances but we can supply this advice to guide your decision.

Consequences of flying too soon after a head injury can range from worsening symptoms to compromised recovery.

After a concussion, the brain needs time to heal. The Physical and cognitive symptoms associated with concussions can be exacerbated by flying. Changes in air pressure, noise levels, and even the motion of the aircraft can all contribute to discomfort and potential complications.

The combination of cabin pressure changes, engine noise, and turbulence during a flight can intensify symptoms and cause discomfort. Cognitive impairments can also affect a person’s ability to fly safely. These symptoms may impact concentration, decision-making, and overall comfort during the flight. It is important to take into account these sensitivities when assessing the feasibility of air travel.

Risks of Flying Too Soon

Risks	Implications
Worsening of symptoms	Increased headache, dizziness, and nausea.
Delayed recovery	Prolonged healing process and increased risk of long-term complications.
Increased discomfort	Heightened sensitivity to noise and motion exacerbating symptoms.

Flying with a Concussion

Flying with a concussion can be challenging, especially if symptoms are not fully resolved.

Here are some key points to consider before flying:

- **Consult a Doctor:** Always seek medical advice before flying, especially if you have experienced seizures, bleeding within the brain, or a skull fracture.
- **Travel Tips:** Choose short, direct flights, avoid red-eye flights which can exacerbate fatigue.
- **Airline Communication:** Inform the airline about your concussion to request assistance if needed, such as a quiet seat or wheelchair.
- **Insurance:** Ensure your travel insurance covers your brain injury and any necessary aids or equipment.
- **Use noise cancelling headphones:** Consider investing in noise-cancelling headphones to block out excessive noise and create a more tranquil environment for yourself.
- **Bring neck support:** such as a travel pillow or inflatable neck pillow, can help alleviate discomfort and reduce the risk of exacerbating headaches or neck pain during the flight.
- **Use an eye mask:** To reduce light sensitivity and lessen unnecessary stimulation.
- **Stay Hydrated:** Proper hydration is essential during air travel, especially after a concussion when dehydration can amplify symptoms.
- **Take regular breaks and move around:** Prolonged sitting can worsen symptoms such as headaches and dizziness. Make it a point to take regular breaks and walk around the cabin when it's safe to do so. This can help improve blood circulation and ease any discomfort.

Severity of Concussion, Recommended Flying Restrictions

Mild:	Consider waiting 24-48 hours after symptoms dissipate before flying.
Moderate:	Wait at least 7-10 days before attempting air travel.
Severe:	Avoid flying for 2-4 weeks or until full recovery is confirmed by a healthcare professional.

Remember, these recommendations may vary depending on the individual case every concussion is different, and the decision to fly should be made in consultation with a healthcare professional.

References and further resources

www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/travel-health/travel-health-and-vaccinations/

www.neurologycareclinic.com/blog/is-it-safe-to-fly-with-a-concussion-medical-advice-and-travel-tips/

www.headway.org.uk/media/12058/holidays-and-travel-after-brain-injury-publication.pdf

www.acibademhealthpoint.com/safe-flying-post-concussion-wait-period-tips/

www.able2travel.com/news/can-you-fly-with-concussion/



Tel: 01463 709146

www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/trauma