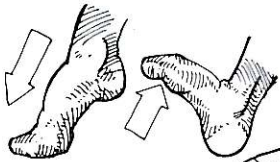


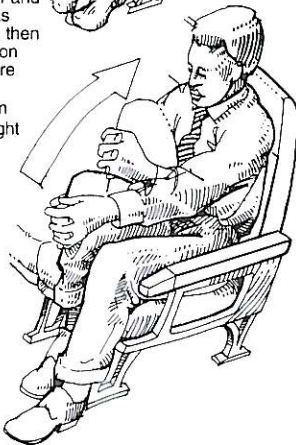
COMFORT AND EXERCISE IN THE AIR

How to exercise on an airplane

Leg, foot stretch



- ▶ Raise seat back, take shoes off and place cushion in lower back.
- ▶ Place hands on knees and press downward firmly.
- ▶ Flex foot so heels are touching floor and toes are raised as high as possible, then shift so toes are on floor and heels are raised.
- ▶ Quickly shift from toe to heel for eight counts. Breathe deeply.



Shoulder rolls

- ▶ Hunch shoulders forward, then lift them up, then back, then down.
- ▶ Repeat.

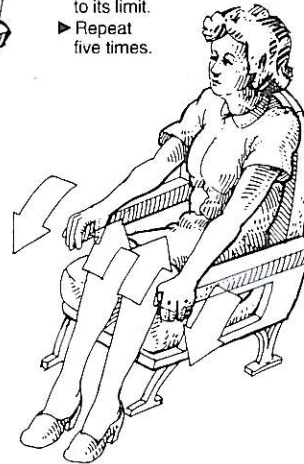


Lower-back stretches

- ▶ Clasp both hands around one knee, pull knee up to chest. Hold for count of five.
- ▶ Repeat with other leg.

Neck stretches

- ▶ Tuck your chin and gently bend your head forward chin to chest.
- ▶ Gently bend the head backward to its limit.
- ▶ Repeat five times.



- ▶ Bend your head to the right as far as possible, to touch ear to shoulder.
- ▶ Do not rotate your head. Bend your head to the left as far as possible, to touch ear to shoulder.
- ▶ Repeat five times.

- ▶ Turn head to the right as far as possible, to bring chin over shoulder and hold for three to five seconds. Do not raise shoulder.
- ▶ Repeat on opposite side.
- ▶ Do five times.

Isometrics for arms, upper chest

- ▶ Press down hard on armrests, hold for count of five.
- ▶ Grab under the armrest and pull up, hold for count of five.

Source: Chiropractors Louis Sportelli and Scott Donkin, Lufthansa

By Web Bryant, USA TODAY

Airline seats are too much, not enough

By Mary Beth Marklein
Special for USA TODAY

Doug Plette's No. 1 rule for air travel: Always get an aisle seat.

That way, when the food and beverage carts are stashed away, "you can stick your legs out," says Plette, who logs about 200,000 miles on airplanes each year.

Extra leg room is no small luxury for Plette, who spends 275 days on the road, leading communications courses for Landmark Education.

At 6 feet 5 inches and 275 pounds, "I'm a big guy," he volunteers. But just about any traveler can develop aches and pains from those one-size-fits-all coach seats, where many business travelers sit.

The problem: Because the seats are designed for a range of body types — from 3 feet 6 inches and 80 pounds to 6 feet 5 inches and 250 pounds, according to one seat maker for several major airlines — they end up being a perfect fit for almost no one.

Individual complaints vary. Louis Sportelli, a Palmerton, Pa., chiropractor who logs 75,000-100,000 air miles a year, says the biggest culprits are lack of leg room, too-narrow seats and ill-fitting head rests. (Most airline coach seats curve slightly forward at the top, which flattens the

natural curves of your spine.)

In an ideal seat, your spine should form a soft curve. It should come forward at the base of your neck, backward slightly between your shoulder blades and forward again in your lower back. Your shoulders should have room to move backward and not be pressed forward by the seat.

But in cramped airline seats, Sportelli says, travelers typically end up slumping — a short-term solution that can throw your body out of whack in the long run, he says.

"The body tends to contort itself," says Lincoln, Neb., chiropractor Scott Donkin, an ergonomics expert and author of *Sitting on the Job*. That can lead not only to back and neck strain, but also to sore muscles, fatigue, eye strain, leg cramps, headaches and numbness in fingers and arms.

Not exactly ideal conditions for your business meeting tomorrow morning. And naturally, the more often you travel and the longer your flight, the worse you'll feel, especially if you're trying to catch up on work. Even one hour in a compromising position can put you at risk for pain — or worse, says Donkin.

Airlines are beginning to sit up and take notice. American Airlines, for instance, this year put cushier seats in 10 jets it flies between Los Angeles

and New York. Lufthansa has begun showing 12-minute exercise videos on some flights to help passengers counter the effects of sitting for long periods of time. Northwest started showing videos during longer flights in 1989.

Seat designers consult ergonomics experts, says Rudy Pecoraro, marketing and sales vice president of Weber Aircraft, which makes seats for about 200 airlines, including Delta, United and American. But manufacturers are limited by safety regulations and airline specifications, he says.

Sportelli says airlines could go a long way toward improving the situation if they added adjustable head rests and tore out just one row of seats to allot more space to each of the remaining seats.

But Pecoraro doubts that will happen soon. "Everything is based on revenue," he says. Instead, he says the next breakthrough will come when manufacturers "find a product that lends itself to giving us more comfort and less material." By replacing bulky materials now used in airplane seats, "we can thin everything out, and that includes the space available for passengers."

Until that happens, he says, "it falls to the traveler to do what he can to make himself more comfortable."

Here are a few ways to save your back when you travel a lot:

▶ Observe the natural curve of your back in a standing position. When you sit in an airplane seat, use pillows to maintain that curve.

▶ Carry two smaller suitcases. They'll keep your spine balanced while you're carrying them. If you must carry one large bag, use a luggage cart. Consider carrying a knapsack or wearing a fanny pack.

▶ If you use a laptop computer, don't put it on your lap. Place it on the tray or atop pillows. Otherwise your head will flex forward because the screen is so low. Your elbows should be bent at a 90-degree angle.

▶ Road Warrior Doug Plette says airplane seats behind exit doors are roomier. He's not shy about asking to switch to a better seat.

▶ Upgrade to first class if possible. You'll get seats that are about 7 inches deeper and 3 inches wider.

▶ Male fliers, do what truck drivers do: Remove your wallet from your hip pocket before you sit.

▶ Wear loose-fitting clothes; change into business clothes later.

▶ Wear tennis shoes and keep them on. Cabin pressure can make feet swell. If you take your shoes off, "you might never get them on again," says Mary Kay Hanke of the Association of Flight Attendants.

▶ Avoid caffeine. The stimulant can make your muscles tense, which inhibits blood flow. Chiropractor Scott Donkin says alcohol in moderation has "some value" if it helps you relax. Best of all is water, which keeps you hydrated. Carry your own bottle.

▶ Exercise. Flex about once every 45 minutes to improve blood flow and to prevent tight muscles and stiff joints. Don't feel embarrassed. "Everyone is health-conscious and everyone knows there are some adverse effects of flying," says Hanke.

▶ To reduce stress, do deep-breathing exercises and eat properly. On short flights, skip meals if they don't match your regular eating schedule.

ON AIRLINE
COMFORT

— Mary Beth Marklein