

Taking some of the fear out of flying...

Thoughts from a NEOFAN family who lived overseas for 10 years and their steps to ensure the safety of their daughter with food allergies on long flights with familiar and unfamiliar airlines in almost every region of the world.

The mere idea of traveling may elicit fear and apprehension for families living with a life threatening food allergy. Travel may become even more precarious when traveling internationally, where it may be difficult to communicate one's needs, and/or where local customs and food may present a more risk-laden environment. Maybe the most anxiety-provoking place to find oneself is on a long-haul flight, 6 miles above the ground (or ocean), without quick access to emergency medical treatment.

Below are some suggestions from seasoned travelers which we hope will ease anxiety and provide for a safer journey.

Our Top Tips:

1. Be politely demanding and insistent. Your "risk radar" must be in high gear.
2. Talk to your allergist. Obtain his/her opinion on the risk different scenarios pose. For example, we recommend asking if skin contact with a surface previously exposed to the allergen and not properly cleaned could initiate an anaphylactic response. Such information can help you objectively try to appreciate the risk involved in traveling.
3. During the flight, refrain from eating food provided by the airline. Instead, only eat foods that you are extremely confident are safe. We pack our own safe snacks. Carrying a lunch box and cooler packs has never presented a problem going through security for us.
4. Have a few bites of the food you intend to eat on the plane well before you board the aircraft. Knowing that a reaction didn't occur in advance may give you some peace of mind when eating something 6 miles up.
5. When booking your ticket, add your allergy to the reservation. Call the airline the day before to confirm that the allergy information is included on your ticket. Double check that the information is included when checking your bags and again at the gate (it is alarming how often this information falls through the cracks).
6. Make it personal: Our scenario- I have my 8 year old child make the following request when boarding the plane: "Hello, I have a severe peanut and tree nut allergy; I want to confirm you will not be serving any nuts on the flight. Also, can you please announce to the other passengers about my peanut tree nut allergy and kindly ask them to refrain from eating any nuts during the flight? My allergy is kinda big deal...thank you!"
7. At the gate, ask to pre-board the plane to clean your seat area. Take a package of wipes or a ziploc bag with pre-soaked soapy paper towels and go over the tray table, walls, window, armrests, seatbelts, and the seat four or five times with a fresh wipe or wet towel each time. You can also ask the flight attendant for a stack of wet paper towels.

8. You may want to bring your own light blanket to cover your seat area. We do not recommend using the airline provided travel pillow or blanket.
9. Carry Epinephrine autoinjectors (as it may take additional time to get help we always care more than we otherwise would). Also, do not forget to bring Benadryl, inhalers and/or other medication needed in a designated bag. Secure the bag in the seat pocket so it is readily available. It is often helpful to show your medication bag to the flight attendant to emphasize the importance of safety measures.
10. Consider taking a set of documents with important information. While electronic copies on your phone are good, having a few hard copies are also recommended.
11. In the event that an allergic reaction occurs, please notify the flight staff immediately. It can take at least 20 minutes to land a plane in an emergency which can be problematic if the reaction worsens.
12. Check out ahead of time the location of the nearest hospital or ER facility at your destination. As not all ambulances are equipped with epinephrine and not all emergency technicians are fully authorized to administer epinephrine during an anaphylactic emergency, you may want to contact the ambulance providers in your area of travel to learn about their policies.
13. If traveling internationally, you may want to request a letter from your allergist validating the severity of the allergy and the need for special accommodations. Some airlines request proof. We faced this in Europe.
For additional information, [International Travel Tips](#)

Domestic Airline Policies

We also advise that you know your airlines policy and procedures . . . some airlines are food allergy friendly, while others are surprisingly not! Like us, you may want to consider choosing who you fly with based on their position. [Domestic Airline Policies](#)

As always, please discuss individual health questions and medical issues with a qualified personal physician.