

# Train for Travel to Avoid Vacation Injuries

By Alison Ramsey

Packing and itinerary-planning are not the only preparations to consider when anticipating travel. To reduce chances of injury while vacationing, travelers should also prioritize physical health and train for upcoming excursions. Start developing a foundation of strength and endurance now to avoid holiday harm.

Dr. Jason Schroder, medical director at Craft Body Scan, said that some travel injuries happen even before leaving the airport.

"I saw a patient last year who tore his rotator cuff trying to lift his suitcase into one of the overhead bins, and he required surgery," he said. "That injury occurred because his shoulder wasn't strong enough for that movement -- aside maybe from poor form and the weight of the suitcase -- and he paid for it."

Schroder finds many patients returning from holiday with strains and sprains from ill-preparation for sudden increase in activity -- hiking, toting gear and traversing uneven walkways. Existing cardiovascular problems can also exacerbate blood-clot risk while sitting on long flights, dehydration from airplane travel and sightseeing overexertion.

"People who live mostly sedentary lives have about three times the rate of injury on vacation as compared to those who exercise regularly," he said. "You go from sitting at a desk all day to hiking 5 miles in unfamiliar terrain. Your tendons and ligaments aren't conditioned for that kind of load, and they fail in response to stress, so the injuries pile up fast."

Simple strength, balance and endurance routines can prepare travelers for heightened activity, preventing small physiological and cardiovascular issues from becoming serious away from home.

Dana McSpadden, the owner of High Definition Wellness Co., believes fitness has become overcomplicated with fancy electronics. While elaborate apparatuses do elicit results, McSpadden believes in simple, effective tools.

"Kettlebell workouts are fantastic for both cardiovascular health and muscle-building," she said. "They allow you to mix both cardio and strength training at the same time, cutting your workout time down while increasing the calories and fat being burned. They also encourage increased and unique movement."



The proper equipment is the first step in training for an active vacation.  
Photo courtesy of Alison Ramsey

Amanda Grimm, We Run running coach and certified personal trainer, suggests squats, planks and lunges for strength-building. Cardio activity such as progressive walk-run intervals develops the aerobic capacity needed for hill climbs and longer walks.

Good balance is fundamental to avoiding falls and can be fine-tuned with the GIBBON SlackBoard, a novel balance training board. Sized like a large skateboard, high-grade maple wood is a solid base for practicing balance and coordination on the slackline (single or double) strung across the top. Suitable for beginners (hold SlackBoard poles for extra stability), this is a fun, portable fitness option.

Derek Mikulski, GIBBON national director of commercial sales, said: "Slacklining is a universal movement translator. The constant micro-adjustments on the line fire your core, hips, ankles and stabilizers -- the same muscles that keep you efficient in the water, powerful on a bike and steady on your feet."

Dr. Maria Knobel, medical director at Medical Cert UK, often sees patients with lower-back muscle strain from carrying luggage or running through an airport.

"Your spine isn't up to that sudden load, and the muscles around your vertebrae lock up to protect the area," she said. "Your body loses its natural spring if you do not exercise regularly. It is like trying to stretch a cold rubber band until it snaps."

SISSEL Spinefitter is a streamlined accessory for reducing spine-injury risk. Lying down and intuitively positioning the spine on this double row of 28 dense foam balls applies counterpressure on surrounding muscles, relaxing them and targeting mobility of the cervical spine and shoulder joints. Performing pelvic bridges and arm circles on the Spinefitter can also improve core power and flexibility.

Per Knobel, recent health reviews indicate almost 25% of travel medical claims involve lower-limb injuries.

"Foot pain associated with plantar fasciitis spoils more sightseeing trips than just about any other physical ailment," she said. "Inflammation occurs when the tough band of tissue that lies underneath your foot stretches too far with no training."

She suggests gradual walking -- wearing the intended travel shoes -- at least one month before departure.

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