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# FAQ: Frequent Airline Questions

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THERE are some things one invariably wonders when waiting for a plane to take off. Is the air vent above my head blowing someone's flu into my face? If I neglect to turn off my cellphone, will I really endanger the plane? If I knock back a cocktail at 30,000 feet, will it knock me out? Plagued by these and other aviation questions at the height of the summer vacation season, I called government officials and medical doctors for answers. Here's what the experts had to say about five common travel bugaboos.

## **Should I Wear Sunscreen on the Plane?**

"Pilots do have a higher incidence of skin cancer," said Dr. James M. Spencer, a member of the board of directors of the American Academy of Dermatology and an expert in skin cancer treatment and cosmetic surgery in St. Petersburg, Fla., referring to several studies about skin cancers among airline pilots.

Why exactly more pilots have skin cancer is not known (for instance it could be from cosmic radiation, changing circadian rhythms or from, say, spending a lot of time outdoors in the places they fly to). And to complicate matters, no one has done a scientific comparison of instances of skin cancer in frequent fliers versus non-frequent fliers, Dr. Spencer said.

But here's what is known: the windows on planes don't block UVA rays, which are associated with wrinkling, skin aging and skin cancer. And a higher altitude means stronger ultraviolet rays. "The dose of UVA at 20,000 feet is a lot bigger dose than you'd get on the surface of the Earth," Dr. Spencer said. Still, the windows on a plane are small, and most people don't fly all day, every day.

"I think the bigger one that people don't realize is their car," he said, "because they spend so much more time in their car." Bottom line: Whatever your regular mode of transportation, bring the sunscreen.

## **Are Cocktails More Potent at High Altitudes?**