The cold Minnesota winter has us all dreaming of exotic destinations. Wherever your travels are taking you, Park Nicollet Travel Clinic experts **Karen (Kari) Pankratz, NP,** and **Lisa Lynch-Jones, NP,** offer tips for staying well so you can enjoy every minute of your vacation.

Park Nicollet Travel Clinic services are available at our Burnsville, Maple Grove and St. Louis Park clinic locations. *Call* **952-993-3131** *to schedule an appointment or visit* **parknicollet.com/travel** *to learn more about our services.*

Illustration by James Gulliver Hancock

1 PLAN AHEAD

If you're traveling abroad, consider a travel clinic consultation four to six weeks before your trip. Foreign travel can be daunting – especially if you are visiting a developing country. The experts at Park Nicollet Travel Clinic, who are certified through the International Society of Travel Medicine, can help prepare you for healthy travel with any necessary medications and immunizations. They also can provide destination-specific guidance on everything from current outbreaks to insect precautions and other travel advisories.

2 FLY HEALTHY

The combination of stale, dry air and hundreds of strangers packed into close quarters makes airplanes the perfect breeding ground for germs. To avoid germs on the plane, wipe down your arm rests and tray table with a disinfecting wipe as soon as you board, and make sure to wash your hands before eating. Staying well hydrated is also key – if your urine isn't clear, you need to drink more water. To prevent blood clots or deep vein thrombosis, get up and move around every hour or two. You can also move your feet and ankles, wear compression stockings and do some in-flight stretching.

3 BE PREPARED

Before you depart, contact your insurance provider to see what type of coverage is offered abroad or look into a short-term international evacuation insurance. Think through an emergency plan, and make sure you have copies of your passport and travel documents. Consider using the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so that the U.S. Department of State can better assist you in an emergency – register for free at travel.state.gov.

If you're packing prescription medications, be sure you keep your medicines in their labeled pharmacy bottles to avoid any hassle at border crossings. You can also ask your pharmacy or doctor to print you a listing of your current medications and immunizations. And be sure to pack your medications in your carry-on bag – just in case your checked luggage gets lost or delayed.

4 AVOID MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE

While the idea of being sick on a trip is unpleasant, about two thirds of Americans who travel to undeveloped or developing countries will get some form of diarrhea during or immediately after their trip. Lessen your risk by using only bottled, chemically treated or boiled water for drinking and brushing your teeth. Eat foods that are well-cooked and served hot. If you do get sick, replace fluids and take Pepto-Bismol or Immodium if needed. Another common gastrointestinal upset during travel is constipation. If you have a tendency to get backed up, drink a lot of water and consider taking fiber tablets.

5 FIGHT JET LAG

Even the most seasoned traveler can succumb to jet lag, but you don't have to let it keep you down for long if you follow a few simple tips. Make sure you are well-rested before your trip, stay hydrated and rest during your flight. As soon as you depart, set your watch to the time at your destination, so you can begin adjusting to that schedule. Once you arrive, stay awake until a reasonable bed time – and don't depend on caffeine. Melatonin is often used to aid sleep and can help reset your internal clock. Other over-the-counter and prescription sleep aids are also available.

6 GET IMMUNIZED

Making sure your routine immunizations (tetanus, hepatitis A, etc.) are up to date before travel is important. If you're going to Latin America, Africa, Asia or any developing country you'll likely need additional immunizations, such as typhoid, yellow fever, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis or rabies. Recommended vaccines will depend on your specific travel plans. And no matter your destination, be sure to get your influenza immunization – travel puts you at higher risk for contracting the flu, especially in tropical climates.