

Flying while pregnant: what you should know about airline policies

There's no reason to be afraid to fly while you're pregnant. Flying while pregnant is usually considered safe, and under normal circumstances it doesn't harm the baby. It does require a little more preparation though, and there are some things you should keep in mind when planning your trip. By preparing yourself you can avoid unpleasant surprises and last-minute stress at the airport – and we all know stress is the last thing you need while pregnant. This article breaks down everything you need to take into consideration about airline policies for pregnant women.

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Health considerations

The medical world generally considers flying while pregnant to be safe if the pregnancy is straightforward. The safest time to fly is until 36 weeks of pregnancy. After this it's recommended to stay home, as you can go into labor anytime. If you're expecting twins, the safest time to fly is before 32 weeks.

Timing is important, and the second trimester (between week 14 and 28) is seen as the best period for traveling. The first semester (up until 12 weeks) is considered less optimal, because of morning sickness and potential miscarriage. In the third trimester (after 28 weeks) the risk of preterm labor increases.

Both pregnancy and long-haul flights are associated with an increased risk of developing blood clots. This doesn't mean you can't fly, but doctors often recommend taking some precautions to be on the safe side. Precautionary measures include wearing compression stockings, moving and stretching your legs regularly, and wearing loose and comfortable clothing.

If there are complications during your pregnancy, consulting a specialist is a must. In fact, even if your pregnancy is straightforward, it's a good idea to consult your doctor before taking off.

Airline policies

Every airline has its own pregnancy policy, and policies vary widely. This means it's always necessary to contact your airline directly and check their specific rules. But to give you a general idea, the most common policies are summarized here:

- A few airlines don't have any restrictions on flying at all.
- The majority of airlines don't have any restrictions until at least 28 weeks of pregnancy.
- After 28 weeks some airlines require a medical certificate.

- Many airlines don't allow pregnant women on board after 36 weeks of pregnancy.
- Other airlines still allow pregnant women to fly up until 7 days before their due date.
- Some airlines don't allow women on board before 7 days after giving birth.

If your airline demands a medical certificate, this usually means you have to provide a note from your doctor that states the due date and confirms it's safe to fly. The note must often be dated within 72 hours prior to departure, so you have to plan this carefully.

The largest airlines

To get you started, these are the pregnancy policies of the five largest airlines in the world.

American Airlines A doctor's certificate stating that you're fit to fly is required within 4 weeks of the due date. On short domestic flights you're not allowed to travel within 7 days before and after the delivery date, unless you have special clearance. On international flights you need special clearance within 4 weeks of the due date and 7 days after delivery.

Delta Airlines Delta Airlines doesn't impose any restrictions on flying while pregnant and doesn't require a medical certificate for you to travel.

Southwest Airlines Southwest Airlines doesn't impose any restrictions on pregnant passengers, but advises them to consult with their physicians and recommends against air travel from 38 weeks of pregnancy. In some cases pregnant women may be asked not to sit in the emergency exit row.

United Airlines Up until week 36 of the pregnancy, United Airlines allows pregnant women to fly without medical documentation. After week 36 a doctor's certificate must be provided, dated within 72 hours prior to departure.

Ryanair RyanAir allows pregnant women to fly up to 28 weeks of pregnancy. After this a 'fit to fly' letter from the midwife or doctor is required. Flying is not permitted beyond 36 weeks of pregnancy for a single pregnancy, or beyond 32 weeks for twins and triplets. Women are allowed to fly 48 hours after birth in case of an uncomplicated delivery, or a minimum of 10 days when caesarean section or surgery was performed.

As you can see, airline policies aren't all the same. When planning a trip while pregnant, it's important to check up on your airlines' rules and time your trip right. But that's no reason to feel discouraged. With the right timing and a few extra precautions there are no obstacles to flying, and there's no reason you can't enjoy a getaway before your little one arrives into your life.