- Flight

THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF TRAVELLING AT 35,000 FT

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Mind

Low air pressure can lead to mild levels of hypoxia, where there is less oxygen in the blood. It can alter our ability to think clearly, our memory and also our mood, increasing anxiety and tension. Nervous fliers also trigger stress hormones. “It’s an alien environment and you have no control, so people sometimes get anxious and overbreathe,” Dr Hughes explains.

Ears

As we go higher into the atmosphere, the air pressure around us drops. To equalise the pressure, your ears ‘pop’ to release air from the middle ear and the sinuses.

Nose

Because of the drop in humidity, your eyes and nose might feel dry. It can also weaken your sense of smell, which is why we crave salty foods.

Mouth

Your mouth may feel dry because of the drop in humidity. That, combined with low air pressure, reduces the sensitivity of our taste buds to salt and sweet by 30 per cent.

Stomach

As a plane climbs, most of us experience gas expansion in the abdomen, which may result in feeling bloated or gassy. Because of the lower air pressure, there is a reduced level of oxygen in the body, which can slow down digestion in the body.

Legs

Sitting for long periods of time, as you do on a flight, can increase the risk of a blood clot inside a deep vein, known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT). A WHO study showed that the risk increased two- to threefold after long-haul flights of more than four hours and similar forms of travel.