

Do you suffer from airplane headache during flight travels? Don't worry, you are not alone!

While many passengers lean back and relax in their plane seats and look forward to their destination, every 12th passenger is anything but relaxed while flying according to new findings on headache associated with airplane travels. A new epidemiologic survey study performed by a group of researchers including two young master students in Translational Medicine at Aalborg University, Denmark, Sebastian Bao Dinh Bui and Torben Petersen, who have shown that eight percent of their study participants suffer from Airplane Headache. The headache was described as very intense (rated as 7-9 on a scale ranging from 0-10, where 10 is the worst imaginable pain) on one side of the head that is pulsating and in the frontal part of the head. The headache occurs either with take-off or landing or both. Those affected describe the pain as very intense. It is presumed that up to 100 million annual flight passengers are suffering from Airplane Headache.

Unclear cause(s) but some hypotheses to test

The survey consisted of 254 flight passengers, where 89 suffered from Airplane Headache. Only 21 of 89 had a headache lasting less than 30 minutes, which is the time limit in the current definition of Airplane Headache by the International Headache Classification. It is currently uncertain as to what reason(s) Airplane Headache develops, but there are number of proposed mechanisms. Up to 95 percent of this study participants believed that the cause of their headache was changes in flight cabin pressure.

Who is at risk?

Many believe that having a migraine is a risk for developing Airplane Headache. But, this study did not find such association. As such, migraine sufferers do not have a higher chance for episodes of flight-related headaches. High Altitude Headache, i.e. a headache which develops when climbing up in mountains, is however a risk factor for developing Airplane Headache. Other studies show that having some painkillers (such as paracetamol) or triptans (a class of drugs against migraine) can prevent Airplane Headache. If you are one of those who get Airplane Headache, suffers from sinus problems, or have a congested nose, it is suggested to take precautions and drink ample amounts of water before and during the flight, as well as considering taking analgesics half an hour before take-off for the best effect. In latter case, it is good to consult the choices with your physician before taking any medication.

Time for pragmatism

The study highlighted some hints on why Airplane Headache might develop, as well as an idea to how many might suffer from it. The Danish researchers from Aalborg University want to know more about this headache. As such, they decided to initiate a trial where healthy participants and participants suffering from airplane headache ran through a simulated flight condition in a pressure chamber, which provides comparable conditions of a real flight. Saliva samples were collected from the participants before, during and after the simulated flight in order to detect possible biomarkers,

which include substances that may reveal some biological processes caused by the simulated flight. This study is not yet completed but findings are promising in terms of simulation of headache and results from saliva analysis might bring them closer to understanding reasons or mechanisms of Airplane Headache This study is the first of its kind and the Danish researchers are very excited and anxiously awaiting final results from saliva analysis, which will hopefully attribute to a better understanding of Airplane Headache.

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Publication

[Headaches attributed to airplane travel: a Danish survey.](#)

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