

First Edition

THE BOAT SAFETY COLLECTION



Preparing For Seasickness
Symptoms & solutions for passengers



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The Boat Safety Collection: Preparing for Seasickness

Symptoms and solutions for passengers

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Symptoms and Solutions for Seasickness

Seasickness affects most sailors at one point or another. Some sailors can't handle swells, others don't like riding the waves and many sailors simply struggle all the time to a lesser or greater degree.

Unfortunately for me, I not only suffer terribly from seasickness but I also have an adverse reaction to motion sickness drugs...and I've tried them all. My friend, Paul, the owner of sailing vessel Delphinus told me, "There are two stages to seasickness. The first is when you feel like your dying. The second is when you want to die." When I heard that saying I couldn't think of anything closer to the truth. Seasickness is not fun.

For the last five years I've tested synthetic and natural drugs. I've tried complementary therapies and I've researched the subject excessively. I have tried everything. With over 18,500 nautical miles under my belt in the last three years alone, I wish that I could report the elimination of my seasickness, but I can't.

I still get sick. However, I don't get as sick as I did when I first started sailing and I certainly don't get sick all the time. In fact, I don't vomit anymore which is a vast improvement from the early days. There's a thing called habituation, or the diminishing of a physiological or emotional response to a frequently repeated stimulus. Some people habituate to seasickness quickly and others, like me, take time.

You'd think that with all the advancements in technology and medicines we'd at least have a solid reason for why seasickness happens, but we don't. The exact cause is still unknown. Some researchers say that it's an inner ear equilibrium issue or explain that seasickness occurs when the brain gets conflicting messages from various parts of the body. For example, when you're down below in a boat your eyes

register very little movement but your body is certainly being pushed around. Perhaps the conflict freaks the mind and body out a bit?

And it might come as a surprise to also discover that researchers don't understand why the vomit response is activated upon seasickness. Thus far, the most interesting hypothesis I've come across is about hallucinating. It's thought that our brain thinks we're hallucinating resulting from poisonous food and therefore is trying to expel the contents of our stomach.

I'm certainly not a professional researcher or a doctor but I definitely have a huge amount of experience with seasickness. Although I haven't yet discovered anyone investigating the correlation between stress and seasickness, I feel strongly that there's a link. I've noticed that the more anxious, fearful and scared I am during a sailing experience, the more prone to seasickness I am. That is, unless I'm totally scared out of my wits and when that happens I become too scared to feel sick.

When we first started out I panicked all the time. I'd panic when we left a marina or lifted our hook. I'd panic when we arrived somewhere. I'd panic when we got stuck in a Force 10 storm (I think that's justifiable!) and I'd panic when we went somewhere new. If I wasn't puking, I was laying in bed experiencing either stage one or two of seasickness.

Over time I became more comfortable with the boat, sailing in new waters and entering marinas. Within a few months the vomit response stopped almost completely. And each month thereafter I managed to feel good for longer and longer. Is it possible that the reduced effects are due to habituation or perhaps I'm just a bit more confident and relaxed? Or is it something else?

There have been very specific examples of me feeling excellent in conditions where I would have otherwise been unwell. Once during a horrific storm I managed to feel fine. I put that down to massive amounts of adrenaline streaming through my veins.

Another time, when we crossed the Ionian Sea from Greece to Italy I discovered that making a macramé bracelet had a calming affect on me. Feeling peaceful, I made one bracelet after another. When we arrived in Italy I realized that the entire three-day trip was enjoyable with not one occurrence of seasickness. Needless to say, I over 20 bracelets I had to find a new home for! I then took up knitting and crocheting and discovered that as long as we weren't in a swell, I actually felt great so long as my mind was focused on the task at hand.

Another example of avoiding seasickness was during a weeklong regatta. We raced for four days and each day was very windy. In a couple cases we had to reef, or reduce, our mainsail. Conditions were strong and I was working the winch and doing the poles on the foredeck. I remember feeling sick in the cockpit and then had to rush forward to lower and then raise a pole. By the time I got back to the cockpit the seasickness was completely gone.

Perhaps it's mind over matter? Or better yet...perhaps it's trying to get your mind not to matter?

My experience has taught me that if I can distract my mind with knitting, reading or racing I seem to be much better off.

Regarding drugs, I think they're great if you're going on a voyage that's no longer than a few days. Most of them stop the vomit reflex so you might still feel bad but it's better to feel bad and not puke than it is to feel bad and puke.

The drugs, however, can really dry you out. Half way across the Atlantic Ocean I woke up with a totally blocked head. My ears blocked to the point where I couldn't hear. After taking Phai Bombers for seven days, an anti-seasickness drug from New Zealand, my body said, 'no more.' The pain in my ears was excruciating.

To combat my seasickness on top of the plugged ears, I used a Scopolamine patch set behind my ear. Unfortunately, I'm one of the 10,000 that is adversely affected by the patch adhesive and it burned a nice little blister into my neck that lasted a couple months.

By now, you must be wondering why I sail. Who in their right mind would endure such issues and keep going? Well, aside from being a bit on the crazy side, I have to state that the sailing lifestyle is so incredibly amazing that I'm okay with dealing with seasickness. Like I said before, I don't get sick all the time and when I do, I now I have a way to manage it.

Almost every live aboard couple or sailing family I've met have routine experience with seasickness. In some cases I know of couples that both struggle. Fortunately for me, my husband, Simon, isn't affected at all. At least one of us is always on the ball!

If you've obtained this guide because you suffer from seasickness and are interested in your options, please go through the various possibilities and test them out. This guide will also provide assistance to those who are helping a person that has become seasick.

So, with that introduction, the objectives to this seasickness guide are as follows:

- To explain how to prepare for someone getting seasick – It's going to happen!
- To help you and your crew/guests understand the symptoms of seasickness so measures can be taken to mitigate affects
- To highlight ways that seasickness can be prevented or stalled
- To list several remedies available that can be instigated before or during a seasickness episode
- To get a feel for what kind of products are available in relation to seasickness remedies

Preparation for seasickness

If there's a potential crewmember, or guest, on board that might be sick (including yourself), prepare in advance.

- Have close to hand a bucket, tissues/wipes, saltine crackers and water. Buckets are better than plastic bags. With a bucket you can throw the contents into the sea. With a bag you'll have to wait until you return to land to properly discard it. Having a smelly puke bag around is not nice and furthermore, if others smell it, they might get sick too!

- Before heading to sea, take the time to explain the symptoms of seasickness, how to prevent seasickness and what to do if someone thinks they're being affected. Explain that it's nothing to be embarrassed about.

- Clarify the options available for vomiting. If a bucket is not available you might want to explain that it is okay to puke over the side (if it is, indeed, okay) or explain the best place to sit to be able to puke over the side. My puke seat is at the stern of the boat – I can easily puke out and back ensuring my vomit doesn't hit the hull. There's also a bar to rest my head on.

- If and when someone gets sick, be able to suggest a few things that might make him or her feel better. Alternatively, you can provide the following checklists for crew/guests to read before departure.

Symptoms of seasickness

- Headache
- Feeling nauseous
- Feeling dizzy
- Irritable
- Head feeling heavy
- Yawning even though you had a good nights sleep
- Feeling tired
- Dry mouth
- Vomiting

Prevention of seasickness

- Drink water before and during a sail – make sure you’re very hydrated. If there’s a fear of having to go below to use the head, drink tiny sips of water often. Consider using the head when tacking, as the boat will level out during the direction change making it easier to move quickly.
- Avoid alcohol and very heavy, greasy foods the day before
- Avoid caffeine and sugar
- Prepare food and water so you don’t have to make unnecessary trips below decks. On long sail days or several day passages I make all the food ahead. I also have loads of snacks and fruit on hand
- Make sure you have appropriate clothing on so not to get too hot or too cold
- Consider preparing something to have on hand that helps your brain to focus on something other than getting seasick like reading a book, knitting, make a macramé bracelet, doing a crossword, etc. I cannot read a book in a car, but I can definitely read a book on the boat. It took me two three years to figure that out! I

often find a thriller or something captivating that allows me to get into a reading 'zone' and prevents me from feeling ill.

- Look at the horizon or focus in the far distance where your eyes can rest on something that is not moving
- Helm the boat. Like driving a car, most motion sickness sufferers do not get carsick when they're driving. Same applies with a boat. This never works for me – I usually get too cold or windblown but my sister-in-law, having a serious motion sickness affliction, helmed for five hours straight and she felt fantastic
- Stay outside in the fresh air and avoid going down below while on passage
- Avoid sudden jerky movements – a quick turn of the head can set seasickness off
- Try any form of anxiety reduction practice. For example, deep breathing, meditation, or guided relaxations
- Eat small amounts of food often and/or chew gum. Food that has been known to ward off seasickness are saltine crackers, ginger snaps, or sucking on lemons/limes. There's also a product called Anchor Nutritional Bars – they are a nutrition bar that's said to prevent and ease nausea (see appendix)
- Avoid looking at someone else that is getting sick or smelling vomit
- Take a drug. In most cases you have to take an anti-seasickness drug before you get on a boat. Some suggest taking a pill, or wearing a patch, at least a day before you set sail. Once a person is seasick, the pills are not effective and oftentimes they're expelled. Some people favor one kind of drug over others. If you're going to sail often, it's worth trying them all to determine which one works best for you. These are the main active drugs that you can get over the counter (Note that

every country has different restrictions. For example, Scopolamine can be purchased over the counter in Italy, Greece and most of the Med however it can only be obtained by prescription in America. In Australia, it's banned). I've noted some drugs you can get online in the appendix:

- Meclizine (Antivert, Antrizine, Bonine)
- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
- Promethazine (Phenergan, Anergan)
- Dimenhydrinate (Dramamine, Gravol)
- Cinnarizine (Stugeron, Stunarone)
- Scopolamine Patch (Transdermscope)

- Take a homeopathic remedy specific for travel sickness. Homeopathic remedies can be found in most drug stores and pharmacies

- Ginger pills can be used to keep your stomach settled. I use to swear by these! You can get ginger pills online or at a nutritional supplement store like GNC. Take the ginger pills before getting on that boat. They are really good for keeping your stomach settled

- Hypnosis for Seasickness or Motion sickness. There are apps on Itunes available. The key is to listen to the hypnosis before you go sailing

What to do if seasickness has set in

- ❑ If seasickness has set in, to alleviate symptoms, rest your head on the boat so that your head is moving with the boat while looking out into the horizon. Test out lying completely flat along the cockpit seat or even on the floor

- ❑ If it's necessary to go below decks, get to the most central part of the boat, usually near the mast. This area is the least turbulent

- ❑ Sleep. Interestingly after a sleep most seasick sufferers report feeling much better

- ❑ Emotional Freedom Tapping Technique for motion sickness. The Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) is a form of psychological acupressure that uses tapping with the fingertips on specific points on the face and body to clear a variety issues. Search for EFT on Google or YouTube to get more information prior to sailing to ensure you can repeat the process once seasickness sets in

- ❑ Acupressure, or the application of pressure (as with the thumbs or fingertips) to the same discrete points on the body stimulated in acupuncture, that is used for its therapeutic effects:
 - DIY – put one of your thumbs and press it on the inside of the opposite wrist, between the two large tendons, about three-quarters of an inch below the point where your inner wrist meets your hand. This targets acupressure point, which affects nausea
 - Use wristbands with pressure balls to massage pressure points. You can buy these at drugstores or pharmacies (see appendix)
 - Acupressure electric signal watch. These are sold at chandleries, boat stores and online. They send an electrical pulse into the acupressure point on your wrist (see appendix)

- Aromatherapy or the use of the use of aromatic plant extracts and essential oils.
There are inhalants that you can easily keep in your pocket. When you start to feel unwell, you smell them (see appendix)

- Natural or Homeopathic Remedies
 - Nox Vom can be taken when you feel like you're going to vomit, not before. This has worked for me on several occasions. You just have to get the pill in your stomach before you puke!

- Audio/Sound Therapy
 - Nevastic Audio App (get from Itunes). This app plays different frequencies of audio sounds through headphones. After a full day of my daughter puking I tried the audio and it worked on her instantly. She felt great afterwards and we kept on sailing for several days. I, unfortunately, didn't have the same positive response
 - Binaural beats for nausea relief. A binaural beat is an auditory illusion perceived when two different pure-tone sine waves, both with frequencies lower than 1500 Hz, with less than a 40 Hz difference between them, are presented to a listener dichotically (one through each ear). I have a few apps on my phone and have found binaural beats to help me sleep better, relax and even meditate. They're worth testing out

- Affirmations/Beliefs
 - From Louise Hay's book, 'Heal Your Body,' she claims that the probable cause for seasickness is 'Fear - fear of not being in control.' And the suggested new thought pattern, or affirmation, is 'I am always in control of my thoughts. I am safe. I love and approve of myself.' Whenever you feel as if seasickness might be coming on you want to repeat this affirmation over and over again

Helping a person who has become seasick (a casualty)

- Provide vomiting options
 - Provide a bag or bucket for the casualty to use. Do this immediately after recognizing symptoms. It's a terribly embarrassing occurrence to have to puke in front of people, so rather than waiting for a five-finger spread, provide a receptacle

- Monitoring the casualty
 - If the sailing trip will be coming to an end within a few hours it's best just to leave the casualty alone. Don't keep asking if he or she 'is okay?' When someone is seasick they just want to be left alone. Make sure the casualty is comfortable (get a blanket if they look cold, ensure they have a bucket and provide water and crackers). Explain that they are exhibiting the normal signs of seasickness and you will get them to land as soon as you can. Once the casualty gets off the boat they should immediately feel a reduction in symptoms. Get them to drink water to replenish liquids

 - If the sailing trip is scheduled to last longer, especially if you're in a hot climate, you have to consider the possibility of dehydration. If the casualty keeps vomiting on a routine basis, you might want to consider asking if they'd like a Scopolamine patch (if they brought one and received the prescription, if necessary, from their personal doctor). Drugs will be expelled but the patch will, at the very least, stop the puke response. You can then get the casualty to drink tiny sips of water often and if possible have him or her drink a rehydration drink. Failing that, if you can get the casualty to fall asleep, preferably up on deck, that will make time go faster for them and upon waking they will most likely feel better

- If you fear there's a possibility for dehydration, I've added a small section below on dealing with dehydration

Dealing with Dehydration

A seasick casualty can quickly slip into a critical condition if he or she gets dehydrated. The symptoms of dehydration are as follows: diarrhea, increased thirst, dry mouth, sleepiness, less frequent urination, dark yellow urine, headache, cramps, dry skin, and dizziness.

When things start getting worse, the symptoms include: A very dry mouth and skin, very dark yellow or brown urine, loss of skin elasticity, lowered pulse rate, sunken eyes, seizure, generalized body weakness, and even coma. Yes – a coma!

Contrary to what many people believe, dehydration cannot be solved by drinking water alone. In fact, in dehydration casualties, drinking water will not solve the problem.

In the States, many people rush out and get Gatorade or an equivalent sports hydration drink. With minor symptoms these drinks might be able to solve the problem, but the World Health Organization (WHO) states that they're not adequate for truly rehydrating a person due to the fact that they have too much sugar in them.

Instead of using Gatorade, you can find Oral Hydration Salts in most pharmacies and even buy them from Amazon.com (see appendix). Failing that, you can make a hydration mixture yourself using clean water (if you're in a place like Mexico don't use the tap water!), salt and sugar.

Oral Hydration Salts Recipe (as listed on the World Health Organization Website)

Add a half-teaspoon of table salt and 6 teaspoons of sugar into a clean container. Add 5 cups, or 1 litre, of water and stir vigorously until it's dissolved. Then drink it up!

While researching information about dehydration mixtures, I noted that there's also a need for potassium. Other websites have various people commenting about adding a thing called, 'Lite Salt,' that is half sodium and half potassium. Perhaps if you can find that product it might be worth putting in your galley?

Apparently, too much potassium can be fatal – perhaps that's why the WHO left it out?! I just eat a banana while drinking my mixture :)

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If you have any suggestions, additions or improvements to this guide on seasickness, please email them to: [Kim@SailingBritican.com](mailto:Kim@SailingBritican.com) and I'll not only test them out myself, but I'll add them to future updates.

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Appendix – Links to seasickness products on Amazon.com

Food Products

- Anchor Nutrition Bars: <http://amzn.to/2eBvEQd>
- Sea-Band Anti-Nausea Ginger Gum: <http://amzn.to/2eenWhO>
- Tummydrops Convenience Bags (Like a hard candy):
<http://amzn.to/2eBYv7W>

Acupressure

- Sea-Band Adult Wristband: <http://amzn.to/2eqkSBp>
- Psi Bands Acupressure wrist bands for the relief of nausea:
<http://amzn.to/2eZUGwA>
- Relief band (watch type system that emits electrical impulses):
<http://amzn.to/2eeoKU7>
- Bioband Motion Sickness Band: <http://amzn.to/2eqlcjO>

Aromatherapy

- NAUSEA & TUMMY Aromatherapy Inhaler: <http://amzn.to/2dvO2ck>
- Nausea Oil Blend, 100% Pure Essential Oils - Ginger, Lavender, Peppermint & Spearmint: <http://amzn.to/2dVEGaE>
- Quease Ease Aromatic Inhaler Essential Oil Therapy: <http://amzn.to/2ePFxib>

Affirmations

- Book: Heal Your Body A-Z: The Mental Causes for Physical Illness and the Way to Overcome Them: <http://amzn.to/2ePjtzp>

Natural Pills and Patches

- Nature's Way Ginger Root Capsules: <http://amzn.to/2eBY11W>
- MQ® Motion Sickness Patch (not to be confused with the drug patch Scopolamine): <http://amzn.to/2eBZMw2>

Over-The-Counter-Drugs

- Dimenhydrinate. Try Dramamine: <http://amzn.to/2eBY3a0>
- Meclizine. Try Bonine: <http://amzn.to/2efZ8Zj>
- Diphenhydramine. Try the generic Benadryl: <http://amzn.to/2eqmxXQ>
- Cinnarizine. Try Gravol: <http://amzn.to/2eepTLl>
- Scopolamine. Call your doctor to request a prescription if in the USA or Canada. In Europe it can be purchased at most drugstores/pharmacies over the counter.

Other options worth considering

- MotionCure Neck Brace (wearable technology): <http://amzn.to/2eZTPw0>
- Copper Bracelet with Magnetic Therapy in Shimmering Silver with 8 Powerful Magnets for Motion Sickness for Men and Women: <http://amzn.to/2eBYVvc>

For Dehydration

- TRIORAL - Oral Rehydration Salts (packets): <http://amzn.to/2eg0bsr>