

Flight interval recommendations for commercial airline passengers who have undergone recent surgical or endoscopic procedures

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Background: Travellers and their healthcare providers struggle to obtain authoritative information about safe flight intervals following surgical or endoscopic procedures. This first review of the subject synthesises current knowledge on flight safety intervals.

Materials and Methods: This narrative review was conducted by searching the PubMed and Scopus electronic databases utilising various keyword combinations supplemented by a grey literature search. Major international airlines were identified and their publicly available recommendations and restrictions regarding postoperative air travel were recorded. Extracted data were synthesised to provide a comprehensive summary of the findings, presented narratively and supplemented with tables and figures.

Results: There was variation in the guidance provided by competent agencies such as the Aerospace Medical Association and the International Air Transport Association and major international airlines. In general, travellers are advised to wait at least 24-48 hours before flying after elective surgery requiring general anaesthesia. This interval is extended based on the extent of the surgical procedure and the patient's baseline health status. Minimally invasive procedures and uncomplicated endoscopies enable shorter intervals, which are extended when biopsies are taken. The variability in recommendations should prompt further research to develop standardised, evidence-based guidelines that account for different procedures and patient profiles.

Conclusion: Determining safe flight intervals following elective procedures should take account of the physiological effects of anaesthesia, the nature of the therapeutic intervention, individual patient factors and comorbidities. Further research into the travel-related risks associated with specific procedures in different patient populations, including medical tourists, will refine these patient safety recommendations.