

Dear Madams and Messieurs,

Over the past few weeks you have asked Canadians to provide feedback as to making air travel more accessible for Canadians. While there are many issues for you to consider, the one I would like to address is the availability of nuts and nut products on airplanes. The simple answer, given all we know about allergies, is that nuts should not be on commercial airplanes. The reasoning is simple:

1. Each year in Canada, more people are diagnosed with potentially fatal nut allergies.
2. These reactions can occur within seconds of exposure and can be frightening even for highly trained medical professionals in a fully equipped emergency department.
3. Nut allergies can be extremely sensitive, where the simple touch of a tray that once had a nut on it can send someone into full anaphylactic shock.
4. Nut protein, unlike many allergens such as dairy, is extremely difficult to clean and requires much more than the passing swipe of a busy flight cleaning crew.
5. More and more schools in Canada have already adopted nut free policies, so the Canadian population is becoming more aware of this issue and accustomed to such a policy.

Thirty years ago as a young teenager I sat on a flight to England in the row immediately behind the smoking section. Your predecessors recognized the ridiculous notion of allowing people to smoke on a plane and fortunately that experience is one my kids do not have to share. In time, people will wonder, like with smoking, why we ever allowed potentially fatal allergens such as nuts in to an enclosed space, ten thousand meters in the sky and hours away from the nearest hospital.

Planes should have a nut free policy. Planes should be required to have epi-pens in their on board emergency kit. These simple actions can easily be the difference between life and death.

As a physician I have helped passengers on many flights. Even with the kits available these have been extremely difficult situations and I have dreaded having to treat an imminently life threatening condition. Were I to face an anaphylactic reaction and not be able to give a life saving epi-pen, I would likely watch helplessly as the person died in front of me before the pilot could so much as change course.

In my career I have reattached hands and reconstructed badly burned faces. It would have been a lot easier if those injuries were prevented in the first place.

You are in the enviable position to save more lives than I ever will.

I would be happy to discuss this further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Paul Oxley

Paul J. Oxley BSc MD FRCSC
Clinical Assistant Professor
University of British Columbia