

ON THE ROAD

Bringing Along Baby Food? Not Too Much, Rules Say

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Published: *NY Times*, February 19, 2008

SAY you are traveling with your baby on a 2 ½-hour flight. The [Transportation Security Administration](#)'s rule says you may carry on baby food and liquids in "reasonable quantities for the duration of your itinerary."

But say you have heard about record airline delays and of some flights stranded for hours on the tarmac during bad weather. That might affect your definition of "reasonable quantities."

Those long waits were definitely on the minds of two Boston area doctors, Anand V. Soni and his wife, Arati Pratap, last week while traveling with their 10-month-old daughter from Chicago Midway Airport to Manchester, N.H.

At security, T.S.A. officers said the couple had too much baby food, and confiscated some. Dr. Soni and Dr. Pratap objected on principle and filed a complaint.

In an interview, Dr. Soni conceded, "We probably had two and a half times as much as we'd need — provided the flight was going to take off on time and land on time, and that we'd be home at the scheduled time."

He added, "I recall that a year ago on [JetBlue](#), one plane sat on a tarmac for 10 hours," with passengers stranded on board.

So the couple packed what he and his wife recalled as five or six 2-ounce jars of Gerber's baby food and 20 ounces of Similac baby formula in two sealed 8-ounce and two sealed 2-ounce plastic bottles.

At the checkpoint, when the parents presented the baby food for inspection, "an agent said, 'Oh it seems like too much. I'm going to have my supervisor take a look,'" Dr. Soni said. The supervisor agreed that it was too much.

"We explained the reason, that we were flying in the winter between two cities notorious for delays in bad weather, so we always pack more. She said, 'I can't make an exception; it's too much food for a flight that's 2 ½ hours,'" Dr. Soni said.

"Evidently the woman had 10 bottles of premixed baby formula and 9 bottles/pouches of baby food," a spokeswoman for the T.S.A., Ellen Howe, said, reading from a report the Chicago officers filed afterward. Dr. Soni said the officers' report exaggerated the quantity.

The parents "mistakenly believed they were entitled to bring on unlimited quantities, which is not what we say," Ms. Howe said. "We say you can bring a reasonable amount for your trip, and obviously the officer has some discretion on defining what that would be."

According to Dr. Soni, the T.S.A. officers said they would need a "doctor's note" to bring on all of the food. He said he pointed out that he and his wife were doctors, and then offered to get a pediatrician colleague on the phone.

The sensible thing to do in this kind of situation is to file your complaint and move on to make your flight, which is what Dr. Soni said he and his wife did.

The T.S.A. officers confiscated some of the food. "They divided it up. They took a jar of prunes and one of bananas, and I think a bottle of formula," he said.

Dr. Soni said he was raising the objection publicly because "I feel the message needs to be put across. I don't think the T.S.A. has the training to exert judgment on what the nutritional needs of a baby are" for a 2 ½ hour flight, not to mention a possible long delay.

Ms. Howe said the officers “were behaving in a reasonable manner with people who were pretty insistent about what they wanted to bring through,” adding, “Obviously this is one of those judgment call gray areas where the officer does have discretion.”

It seems to me that the Traveling With Children rule on baby food is vaguely written (it is available at www.tsa.gov; click on For Travelers). It was drafted as an exception for babies within the already confounding regulations on carry-on liquids and gels.

Dr. Soni stressed that he and his wife have no quarrel with the T.S.A. officers, but would like to see a rule allowing parents more discretion. He also suggested that airport shops inside the security zones consider selling baby food.

“It is subjective,” Ms. Howe conceded of the rule on baby food. She said the issue might be a good subject for public discussion on the new T.S.A. blog, www.tsa.gov/blog.

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