

All My Bags Are Packed...

In this new readers' column, 27-year-old Marco Aizawa blogs about what goes into his bag when he sets off to explore the world.

I have scaled Mount Kinabalu twice, cycled to Kuantan twice, on all occasions with Touch Diabetes Support. I have travelled to Vietnam and a few other Malaysian states like Kuala Lumpur, Desaru and Kota Tinggi. If these expeditions and travels have taught me anything, it is how to pack smart.

For a person with diabetes, you really cannot be too careful. And well, there are some things you should never worry about overpacking. Such as your meds!

There are ten things I never leave home without:

1. My medication which includes pills and insulin or both. I would make sure they are stored away from direct sunlight, extreme heat or cold, depending on which country you are travelling to.
2. Extra medication in case I run out. It pays to be 'kiasu'.
3. My Medik Awas card – it is an identification card telling people that I have diabetes in case of any emergency. Here again, it never hurts to be extra careful.
4. My glucometer with enough test strips to last my entire trip.
5. A letter or memo to cover me as I often carry my meds with me in my hand luggage.
6. Plastic bags with seals and locks for my medication, glucometer, and even for important documents so they will be safe from the rain. Yes, I am cautious, if you haven't noticed already.
7. Moisturiser to prevent dry skin.
8. Insect repellent to prevent bites, and antiseptic creams should you actually get bitten. You don't want to start scratching at those nasty bites.
9. A travelling companion. It would be a boon if you can travel somewhere with your friends who know of your condition, so they can look out for you.
10. Diabetes management skills. Know how to handle high sugars; maybe eat less, rest more and drink

more water. Low blood sugars, on the other hand, mean you need to know the type of food you are eating and how much insulin to give. It takes practice but you can't do without these skills. Do consult your doctor before you make any adjustments.



I've been fortunate that nothing terribly inconvenient or problematic has arisen from my many travels thus far. Perhaps it is because I take extra care when it comes to consuming different types of food in foreign countries to avoid diarrhoea and causing my blood sugar levels to go up.

There was, however, one occasion in Desaru when things did not work out so very well. I had gone there to participate in a triathlon with a bunch of friends as a relay team (which meant one individual swam 1.9km, one cycled 90km and one ran 21km). I did the cycling leg.

After cycling 90km, I rested and had a little lunch, gave myself small dose of Insulin, half of my normal dosage. I didn't drink a lot of water then as I didn't feel very thirsty.

I discovered at dinner that my sugars had climbed to 17.0mmol, exceeding the healthy level of 7 to 10 mmol after exercise. I needed more insulin to bring down my sugars. Thankfully I recovered from that lapse of good judgement after half an hour.

And did I say that you can't be too careful? I guess I learnt my lesson well that day.

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