



Have Diabetes Will Still Travel

If you live a rather hectic life, a getaway seems like the perfect idea, especially with the approaching school holidays and festive season. Praveen Gosal Kaur shows you how to make your perfect trip take flight without being bogged down by diabetes.

Whether your vacation plans involve staying close to home or crossing the globe, having diabetes should not suppress your urge to travel. Nothing is impossible if you plan it well in advance before making that well-deserved trip.

Protecting your health while travelling is just as important as choosing your destination. Here are some pointers to aid you for a safe and healthy holiday:

Visit your diabetes team

Inform your doctor at least one month in advance. It is important for your diabetes team to decide if you are fit to travel and provide advice on the management of diabetes during your vacation. They may also recommend the appropriate vaccinations required.

Ask how time zone changes may affect your regime, especially if you are on insulin. You would need an official letter from your doctor to state the types of medications, insulin, syringes and pen needles required for your treatment. The official letter from your doctor can act as a supporting document when you are required to declare these items at the customs checkpoint.

It is advised that the original pharmacy labels are fixed on the package that contains your medications or insulin. Obtain a copy of your prescription from your doctor in case you require

a refill while travelling. Do pass a copy of your prescription to your travelling partner.

If you are using an insulin pump, pack both short and long acting insulin in case your pump fails and you do not have a back up. Talk to your diabetes nurse educator or your doctor about what to do in case of a pump failure and ensure that you are familiar with the pump settings.

Speak to your dietitian, if required, to discuss your food options when you are travelling to a particular country where the type of food served may not suit your taste buds. You can talk about alternatives that you could have.

Ensure you have ample supplies

When travelling, ensure that you bring twice of what you need in case it gets damaged, stolen or experience a flight delay (due to volcanic ash cloud, for example). No matter how far or how long you will be travelling, you should not practise the habit of bringing “just enough” for that trip that you are about to make. A buffer of extra medication will give you the time you need to find appropriate supplies locally, although if you are going somewhere more remote then it may be worth taking extra precautions. If you are travelling with a partner, put half of your medications in their carry-on. In this way, if you lose your bag, you will still have enough to last the rest of the trip.

Familiarise yourself with the country that you are visiting

Do your homework and ask yourself logistical questions about your destination. Enquire about the location of the hotel and its accessibility to the grocery store, clinic or the nearest hospital available in case of an emergency (most applicable for type 1 diabetes).

If you are visiting a country with a hot climate, it is best to carry a cooler bag for your insulin. Get yourself insured and enquire if the insurance covers your visit to the hospital or a clinic there. Be well prepared with appropriate information that covers your safety if you are travelling to a developing country.



PASSPORT

Prepare a list

After gathering the appropriate information and advice from your healthcare team, it would be helpful to prepare a list of your supplies. Include the following in your carry-on:

- Doctor's notes and copies of your prescription
- Your doctor's or diabetes nurse educator's emergency number if applicable
- Medications and/or insulin vial/insulin pens/insulin cartridges with prescription labels attached
- Know your medication - knowledge of generic names and local brands can make all the difference.
- Glucometer, ample blood glucose test strips in case you require frequent monitoring, ketone test strips, ample lancets, batteries for your glucometer and the manual
- Ample syringes and/or pen needles
- Alcohol swabs
- Ample supplies for your insulin pump
- Snacks to stand by just in case of a delayed meal, e.g. cereal bar, granola bar, wholegrain biscuits, small box of raisins, sweets
- Know basic first aid and carry a simple first aid kit

Any unbreakable items beyond a week's supply can be packed in your checked luggage. However, when it comes to insulin and other liquid medication, storing them in your carry-on is the safest way to go. Checked luggage may not endure extreme temperatures while it is in cargo and glass vials are also more susceptible to breakage while in transition.



Take care of your feet

Make sure that you travel with comfortable, well-fitting shoes in case your feet swell. Ensure that you do not use a new pair of shoes when you are travelling. It may increase the chances of blister formation.

Keep checking your feet every evening and morning. If you develop a blister, do stay out of the sea, cover it with a plaster and keep it clean. Do not walk barefoot, particularly on hot sand.

Enjoy your trip

You may be overwhelmed with all the preparation needed. But, do not allow it to stop you from enjoying the pleasures of soaking in the wonders of our world. Remember, all this 'prep' work is done to keep you safe while you enjoy your holiday. Have a great trip!