

Have Diabetes. Will Travel.

Heading out of town? Leaving your troubles behind? Off on an important business trip? Whenever you travel, your diabetes comes along with you. And while having diabetes shouldn't stop you from traveling in style, you *will* have to do some careful planning. Here are some helpful diabetes travel tips from the National Diabetes Education Program.

Plan ahead. Make sure you:

- Get all your immunizations. Find out what's required for where you're going, and make sure you get the right shots, on time.
- Control your **ABCs**: **A**1C, **B**lood pressure, and **C**holesterol. See your health care provider for a check-up four to six weeks before your trip to make sure your ABCs are under control and in a healthy range before you leave.
- Ask your health care provider for a prescription and a letter explaining your diabetes medications, supplies, and any allergies. Carry this with you at all times on your trip. The prescription should be for insulin or diabetes medications and could help in case of an emergency.
- Wear identification that explains you have diabetes. The identification should be written in the languages of the places you are visiting.
- Plan for time zone changes. Make sure you'll always know when to take your diabetes medicine, no matter where you are. Remember: eastward travel means a shorter day. If you inject insulin, less may be needed. Westward travel means a longer day, so more insulin may be needed.
- Find out how long the flight will be and whether meals will be served. However, you should always carry enough food to cover the entire flight time in case of delays or unexpected schedule changes.

Pack properly.

- Take twice the amount of diabetes medication and supplies that you'd normally need. Better safe than sorry.
- Keep your insulin cool by packing it in an insulated bag with refrigerated gel packs.
- Keep snacks, glucose gel, or tablets with you in case your blood glucose drops.
- If you use insulin, make sure you also pack a glucagon emergency kit.
- Make sure you keep your medical insurance card and emergency phone numbers handy.
- Don't forget to pack a first aid kit with all the essentials.

Some things to keep in mind if you are flying:

- Plan to carry all your diabetes supplies in your carry-on luggage. Don't risk a lost suitcase.
- Have all syringes and insulin delivery systems (including vials of insulin) clearly marked with the pharmaceutical preprinted label that identifies the medications. The FAA recommends that patients travel with their original pharmacy labeled packaging.
- Keep your diabetes medications and emergency snacks with you at your seat -- don't store them in an overhead bin. If the airline offers a meal for your flight call ahead for a diabetic, low fat, or low cholesterol meal. Wait until your food is about to be served before you take your insulin.

Otherwise, a delay in the meal could lead to low blood glucose. If no food is offered on your flight, bring a meal on board yourself. If you plan on using the restroom for insulin injections, ask for an aisle seat for easier access. Don't be shy about telling the flight attendant that you have diabetes --

especially if you are traveling alone. When drawing up your dose of insulin don't inject air into the bottle (the air on your plane will probably be pressurized).

Because prescription laws may be very different in other countries, write for a list of International Diabetes Federation groups: IDF, 1 rue Defaeqz, B-1000, Belgium or visit <http://www.idf.org>. You may also want to get a list of English-speaking foreign doctors in case of an emergency. Contact the American Consulate, American Express, or local medical schools for a list of doctors.

Insulin in foreign countries comes in different strengths. If you purchase insulin in a foreign country, be sure to use the right syringe for the strength. An incorrect syringe may cause you to take too much or too little insulin.

Some things to keep in mind on a road trip:

- Don't leave your medications in the trunk, glove compartment, or near a window -- they might overheat. If possible, carry a cooler in the car to keep medications cool.
- Bring extra food with you in the car in case you can't find a restaurant.

General traveling tips.

- Stay comfortable and reduce your risk for blood clots by moving around every hour or two.
- Always tell at least one person traveling with you about your diabetes.
- Protect your feet. Never go barefoot in the shower or pool.
- Check your blood glucose often. Changes in diet, activity, and time zones can affect your blood glucose in unexpected ways.

You may not be able to leave your diabetes behind, but you can control it and have a relaxing, safe trip. To learn more about controlling your diabetes, visit the National Diabetes Education Program at <http://www.ndep.nih.gov>.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Diabetes Education Program is jointly sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with the support of more than 200 partner organizations.

June 2006