

Travelling with Diabetes

Travelling can be complicated if you're diabetic. Crossing time zones, new foods, and a change in temperature can all make controlling your glucose levels tricky. But, some extra planning before you go will save you a lot of bother later on.

Before you go

When you know you have a trip coming up, make an appointment to speak to your diabetes team or GP. They can help you with a number of aspects of travel, such as:

- Working out the timings for your medication while you're away. This is especially important if you will be taking a long haul flight and/or crossing time zones.
- Explaining how heat, humidity, and high altitude can affect your insulin, blood glucose monitor, and test strips, and what to do if you get results you're not expecting.
- Explaining how to adjust your dosage if needed – insulin is absorbed faster in hot climates, and slower in very cold climates.
- Providing a letter that you can take with you, confirming that you need syringes and needles for a medical condition.
- Informing you about any vaccinations that you'll need before you travel.

Plus, don't forget to:

- Buy good travel insurance - remember, don't just buy the cheapest as it may not cover everything you need. Check the level of cover carefully and declare all pre-existing conditions.
- Apply for an EHIC (European Health Insurance Card) - if you're travelling to a country in the European Union. You can apply for one online <http://www.ehic.org.uk> or fill in a form at the Post Office.
- Get enough medication and related supplies to last you for the whole trip. It's advisable to take around double what you would normally need - just to be on the safe side.
- Take a diabetes ID bracelet - so that if you need medical help abroad, the health professionals will know about your condition.
- Do some research on your destination - looking into the area and its facilities may be useful. Find out what types and strengths of insulin are available there (you may need to contact the relevant pharmaceutical company for more information).
- Learn how to say that you are diabetic in the relevant country's language (a good phrase book should include this).

The journey

These simple tips should help make your journey run more smoothly:

- Always carry plenty of food in your hand luggage, including sugar-free drinks and your favourite artificial sweeteners.

- On an aeroplane, don't take your insulin until you can see the food trolley is on its way. Meals can be unexpectedly held up at times.
- Carry insulin in your hand luggage. If it goes into the hold of an aeroplane, it could freeze and become unusable.
- Travelling to high altitude areas can cause insulin to expand and contract, so watch out for air bubbles in the cartridge or pen. If you can't get rid of the bubbles, use a syringe and needle instead.
- Wear well-fitting, comfortable shoes on the journey in case your feet swell.

When you get there

- Keep your insulin away from direct sunlight and out of hot places such as car glove compartments or bathroom cabinets. A cool box can usually help to keep it at a safe temperature - but be careful not to leave it next to an icepack as it may freeze.
- Try keeping the clock on your mobile phone, or a spare watch, at UK time so that you can see at a glance when you would normally have something to eat.
- If you get diarrhoea or sickness, drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration, and continue to take your usual tablets or insulin, even if you can't keep any food down. Seek medical advice if it continues for more than 24 hours.
- Look after your feet - wear comfortable shoes, and don't walk barefoot, particularly on hot sand. Check your feet every morning and evening, and if you have any blisters or cuts, keep them clean, cover with a plaster, and stay out of the sea.