

The Diabetic Traveler

Planning Ahead

Planning ahead is the first key for the diabetic traveler. Visit your healthcare professional before your trip to make sure your diabetes is under control.

Get a letter and a prescription from your doctor explaining what you need to do for your diabetes, such as take diabetes pills or insulin shots. The letter should list insulin, syringes, and any other medications or devices you use. It should also include a list of your allergies to foods and/or medications. If an emergency occurs while you are traveling in a foreign country, contact the American Consulate, American Express or local medical schools for a list of doctors.

No matter where you go, wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace that shows you have diabetes. If you're leaving the country, also learn how to say, "I have diabetes" and "sugar or orange juice, please" in the language or languages of the countries you'll visit.

Packing Tips

The second rule of travel for a person with diabetes is to pack twice as much medication and blood-testing supplies as you think you will need. Take them with you in a carry-on bag. This bag should also include: insulin and syringes, blood and urine testing supplies, other medications or medical supplies (such as glucagons, anti-diarrhea medication, antibiotic ointment, and anti-nausea medications), your ID and diabetes identity card. Make sure to pack an airtight snack pack of crackers, cheese, peanut butter, fruit, a juice box, and some form of sugar (hard candy or glucose tablets) to treat low blood glucose.

Other Things to Remember

When you fly, you can request a special meal low in sugar, fat, or cholesterol. A delay in meal delivery could lead to low blood glucose levels. Always carry some food with you so that, if your meal is delayed, you won't be stuck with an empty stomach.

- Store insulin in a cool place. In hot or very cold temperatures, insulin may lose strength. Many travel packs are available to keep insulin cool.
- Use the exact brand of insulin that your physician has prescribed. Changes in formulation may require medical supervision.
- Insulins used in foreign countries may be a different strength. Buy syringes to match to avoid a dosage mistake.
- If you are crossing time zones, plan your insulin injections ahead. Talk to your health care provider about any insulin adjustments that need to be made. To keep track of shots and meals through changing time zones, keep your watch on your home time zone until the morning after you arrive.
- If you inject insulin in flight, be careful not to inject air into your insulin bottle. In a pressurized cabin, pressure differences can cause the plunger to "fight you," which can make it difficult to measure insulin accurately.
- Check your blood glucose while traveling. If you are more active than usual, your blood glucose could go too low. Always take along snacks.
- Watch what you eat and drink. Avoid tap water overseas.
- Wear comfortable shoes and never go barefoot. Check your feet every day. Look for blisters, cuts, redness, swelling, and scratches. Get medical care at the first sign of infection or inflammation.

For more information, visit these websites:

http://diabetes.org/advocacy-and-legalresources/discrimination/public_accommodation/travel.jsp
http://ndep.nih.gov/diabetes/pubs/Diabetes_travel_article.pdf