



Travelling with Diabetes

Diabetes is NOT a barrier to travelling. However, to ensure you have a safe and enjoyable trip be sure to plan well and think carefully about what supplies you will need for your diabetes management when travelling.

Before you go

Discuss your travel arrangements with your doctor or diabetes educator for advice on:

- Medication
- Insulin adjustments
- Vaccinations
- Anti-diarrhoea, anti-nausea and anti-malarial medication if going to designated tropical areas
- Glucagon
- Deep vein thrombosis
- Ask your doctor for a letter which states that you have diabetes, the treatment you are on and a list of the medical supplies you will need to take with you. (See documentation section below.)
- Travel insurance is essential. Ensure that your accident and health insurance covers pre-existing conditions and the countries you plan to visit.
- If crossing time zones, consult your doctor regarding any insulin changes that may be required.
- Check with your airline at least 2 days in advance. There are different security requirements in different countries.

Documentation

- If flying in Australia your NDSS card is a useful addition to your doctor's letter to assist passage through security.
- If travelling overseas, apart from your passport and visas you will need a doctor's letter for several reasons:
 - Having your doctor's letter which states what medication you are on, especially if you're on insulin will help to ensure a quick passage through security. The letter should also state that you need to blood glucose monitor while travelling.
 - If you intend to use your doctor's letter to export medication overseas for your personal use, then the doctor's letter must contain a list of all the medications you are taking overseas, including over the counter medications and herbal preparations. The list must include the exact quantity of each medication and your daily dose for each medication. Be sure the letter includes your NDSS products as well. This is now a requirement of the Commonwealth Government Department, the Health Insurance Commission. If you do not have a doctor's letter with all of the required information or a completed PBS Medicine Export Declaration form, then the Customs Officer has the right to remove and detain your medication before you leave Australia if it is suspected of being exported illegally.

The PBS Medicine Export Declaration form is available from any Medicare office or you can download it from: www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

- If you become ill while overseas then the letter is invaluable in assisting your treating doctor.

Check with the embassies/consulates of your destination overseas as to whether the medications you are taking are legal in their country. (For example some countries have restrictions on the number of asthma puffers you are allowed.) It may be necessary for them to provide you with documentation.

- Have contact details of the Australian Embassy/Consulate in the countries you are visiting. They will have a doctor attached to them. If there is not an Australian Embassy/Consulate then have the contact details of a British or American one.

Planning your travel

- Plan ahead for regular stops along the way.
- Try to arrange for arrival and departure at convenient times of the day. Allow plenty of time to make your travel connections
- Arrive well in advance of the airline's suggested departure check-in time.
- When travelling long distances check that the meals available are suitable - low fat, high fibre with adequate, quality carbohydrates. It is not advisable to ask for specific diabetes meals as they are often high in fat and low in sugar only, and the taste is variable.
- Pack a supply of medications, test strips, insulin and syringes that is more than you require for your whole trip. When packing your strips and medications leave them in their original packaging with the label that has details your name and dose instructions clearly displayed.
- Check PBS/NDSS regulations on how much medication and NDSS products you are entitled to take overseas. For information on NDSS products contact Diabetes Australia on 1300 136 588. To check PBS regulations contact 1800 888 333.

If travelling overseas for extended periods contact drug companies for information regarding the availability of your diabetes supplies in other countries.

- When travelling long distances, regular meal breaks and blood glucose monitoring are recommended.

Airline security

- It is your right to carry on board your insulin and blood glucose monitoring supplies, however you will need to check security arrangements for Australian airports and also the country you are travelling to, for your return flight.
- Be aware that there are constant changes and upgrading of security in air travel worldwide.
- For up to date information, contact the airline you are travelling with ahead of time.
- Call the airline carrier at least two days in advance of your scheduled flight to ensure that they are aware of your need for in-flight access to diabetes medications and supplies and to provide you with up to date information on security requirements for your return flight.
- Have your medication and strips in their original packaging with your name and dose instructions label clearly displayed.

Car trips

- Plan ahead with regular stops, allow plenty of time, and don't rush
- Stop for meals
- Pack extra diabetes supplies
- Be aware of the medical standards required for licences to drive, particularly in relationship to hypoglycaemia. For further information contact us on 1300 136 588.

- Don't forget to monitor your blood glucose levels.
- If you experience hypoglycaemia (hypos) while driving, stop the car and treat the hypo. Do not resume driving until you have recovered.
- Hypoglycaemia unawareness must be referred to a specialist for review of ability to retain a driver's licence.

When travelling

- If you are taking diabetes tablets or insulin, carry some form of quick acting carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets or jelly beans to treat hypoglycaemia.
- Carry some emergency food rations such as dried fruit or biscuits in case of a delay in your travel schedule.
- Keep medications, insulin, syringes and testing equipment readily available.
- Carry plentiful supplies of insulin or tablets and a supply of food in your hand luggage.
- You may be going to Hong Kong but your luggage may end up in Bahrain! It is advisable to split your supplies into two, i.e. cabin and cargo hold luggage just in case. On commercial airlines the cargo hold is perfectly safe to hold your insulin; however it is a good idea to store it in the middle of your case to protect it from knocks.
- The Civil Aviation Safety Authority states that the temperature in the cargo hold of commercial airlines is kept at the same temperature as the cabin. Therefore it is safe to store spare insulin in your hold baggage.

- Be aware however that this temperature will not meet the 2°C - 8°C range recommended by manufacturers for insulin not in use and it would be now considered in use. Technically in use insulin should be discarded after 28 days even if unopened. Therefore if you choose to use this insulin after 28 days is mindful that its potency cannot be guaranteed by the manufacturer, and blood glucose levels should be monitored carefully.

The excitement of the trip may affect your blood glucose levels, so check your blood glucose levels more often and adjust your insulin if necessary.

- Wear some form of identification indicating that you have diabetes e.g. Medic Alert bracelet, necklace or card.
- Wear appropriate shoes. Remember to "wear in" any shoes before you go.
- Carry a small first aid kit with you.
- Carry a detailed letter from your doctor.
- Carry a prescription for your diabetes medication.
- Carry your NDSS registration card when travelling within Australia.

