

Travel

Careful planning before travelling is essential when you have diabetes. There are several things to consider before you go, including your diabetes management and general health, what to pack, travel insurance, available food choices and any special requirements for flying.

Whether you are travelling by plane, train, boat or car, within Australia or overseas, plan early to make sure you have everything ready before you go.

Preparing for your trip

Talk to your doctor or Credentialed Diabetes Educator about your travel plans well ahead of your trip.

- » Your medical conditions
- » Your diabetes medications (including dosage and how often you take them)
- » Devices you use for diabetes (such as a blood glucose meter, lancet, insulin pen/syringes, continuous glucose monitor or insulin pump)
- » The importance of carrying your medications with you at all times
- » That if you are at risk of low blood glucose levels (hypoglycaemia or a hypo), you need to carry hypo treatment with you at all times
- » That your insulin pump or continuous glucose monitor (if you use one) must not be removed (even when going through airport security)
- » Any other medications you take.

If you are travelling overseas, think about whether the letter needs to be translated into the primary language of your destination country. Take several copies of this letter or have it available on an electronic device (such as a smart phone or tablet). Present it at security checkpoints or medical services, if necessary.

Discuss your sick-day management plan with your doctor and Credentialed Diabetes Educator. Put together a sick-day management kit before travelling, and make sure you pack it in your carry-on luggage.



If you are going away for an extended period of time, talk to your Credentialed Diabetes Educator about your National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) allowance for supplies. Check that your medications and supplies (such as blood glucose monitoring strips) won't go out of date while you are away. Make sure you have enough supplies to last the entire trip, because purchasing these overseas can be costly.

When travelling overseas

Before you travel

- » Talk to your doctor about any vaccinations you may require well ahead of your trip. You may also like to discuss what other medications you may need to take with you in case you need them, for example medication for nausea.
- » Take out travel insurance for both your health and your belongings. Make sure your travel insurance (accident and health cover) is valid for both pre-existing conditions and the places you will visit. If you use an insulin pump, consider insuring it as well.
- » Have clearly written details of your next-of-kin or family member.
- » Take the phone and email details of your doctor and Credentialed Diabetes Educator (and those of your insulin pump company, if relevant).
- » Always carry identification and consider wearing a Medic Alert bracelet or something similar.
- » When travelling by air, put all your diabetes supplies in your carry-on luggage, preferably split between two carry-on bags.
- » If you are travelling across different time zones, ask your doctor or Credentialed Diabetes Educator to prepare a plan for how to adjust the times and doses of your medications.
- » Have the contact details of relevant manufacturers and local diabetes associations in the countries you plan to visit in case you need advice on local products or services.
- » If you use an insulin pump, some companies may lend you a spare one to take while travelling. Check with your pump company. You should always have a back-up plan in case of pump failure. Have a copy of your pump settings recorded and keep it with you for easy reference.

What to pack

- Letter from your doctor
- Prescriptions for all current medications
- Sick day action plan & management kit
- Your NDSS card (to prove you have diabetes)
- Insulin, in a cool pack (do not freeze). It is recommended to take double the amount of insulin you would normally need for the length of your trip.
- Insulin pens or syringes & needles to last for the whole trip (plus extras)
- Insulin pump (if you use one) plus spare batteries & consumables (inserters, lines & alcohol wipes)
- Spare blood glucose meter & spare batteries
- Extra lancets & spare lancing device (finger-pricker)
- In-date urine or blood ketone strips, if you use them (including extras)
- Basic first aid kit, including band aids, antiseptic & thermometer
- Travel-size sharps container with lid
- Carbohydrate snacks, such as plain biscuits, crackers or dried fruit
- Easily absorbed hypo treatment, such as glucose tablets or jellybeans (if needed). Check with airlines about taking liquids on the plane if you plan to use a liquid hypo treatment
- Continuous glucose monitor (if you use one) and consumables.

While travelling

- » When travelling overseas, insulin needs to be in pharmacy-labelled packaging (each box of five needs a separate label). Store it in a cool pack in your carry-on luggage.
- » If you take insulin or diabetes tablets (that can cause hypos), carry some easily absorbed carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets or jelly beans (in case of hypo). Pack some longer-acting carbohydrate, such as biscuits, crackers or dried fruit, but check if you need to throw this out before going through customs at your destination.
- » If you have type 1 diabetes, consider taking glucagon with you – as long as you are travelling with someone who is trained to give this when needed. Make sure the glucagon is in date, in pharmacy-labelled packaging, and stored in your carry-on luggage.
- » If you use an insulin pump or continuous glucose monitor, declare it at the security checkpoint and inform security staff that your device must not be removed, as stated in your doctor's letter.



- » Keep track of your 'departure' time zone and 'destination' time zone. If you use an insulin pump, you will need to change the time in the pump to the local time once you arrive at your destination.
- » Provide family and friends with a copy of your travel itinerary, contact details and important travel documents.
- » If you use an insulin pump and continuous glucose monitor, keep your consumables and supplies in their original packaging in your carry-on luggage.

Additional tips when flying

At the airport

It's unlikely that insulin will be harmed by exposure to X-rays in security equipment. However, if you are concerned, you can ask airport security staff to physically check you and your luggage rather than using the X-ray equipment. Security staff are required to respond to such a request under government agency regulations.

During the flight

Keep your diabetes supplies where you can reach them immediately, even if the seatbelt sign is on. The best place is in the seat pocket in front of you – not under the seat or in the overhead locker.

There is no need to order 'diabetic' meals. If there is not enough carbohydrate (such as pasta, bread, rice or potato) served with your meal, ask for extra carbohydrate or use your packed carbohydrate snacks. Drink enough water to avoid becoming dehydrated. Get as much sleep as possible but ask the cabin crew to wake you for meals.

If you use an insulin pump or continuous glucose monitor, talk to your diabetes health professionals about managing these devices during air travel.



Always wait until your meal is in front of you before having insulin or oral medications that may cause hypo. For added safety, you can take your insulin halfway through the meal or immediately afterwards if your meal is delayed or if there is an interruption during the flight.

Wear comfortable shoes and exercise your feet to help prevent swelling. Try to move around the cabin as often as you can. Walking up and down the aisle will assist circulation and help to keep your blood glucose levels within your target range.

Provide your family and friends with a copy of your travel itinerary, contact details and important travel documents.

What if something goes wrong while you are away?

Careful planning for travel will reduce the risk of things going wrong. However, if something does go wrong, don't panic – seek medical assistance if required (ideally, with advice from your travel insurer).

If you are travelling overseas, consider registering your travel plans with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The department can then contact you or your family in the event of an emergency.

The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.