

# 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 motor vehicle, within Australia or overseas, plan early to make sure you have everything ready before you go.



## Preparing for your trip

Talk to your doctor about your travel plans well in advance of your trip.

Ask for a typed letter outlining:

- » 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 or insulin pump)
- » the importance of you 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 blood 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 languages of your destinations. 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 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, talk to your 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 Check that your medications and supplies (such as blood glucose monitoring strips) won't go out of date while you are away.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 in advance of your trip.
- » 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 beforehand.
- » Have clearly written details of your next-of-kin or family member.
- » Take the phone and email details of your doctor and diabetes educator (and those of your insulin pump company, if relevant).
- » Always carry identification and consider wearing a Medic Alert bracelet or 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 in different time zones, ask your doctor or 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 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)
-  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 bandaids, 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)

## 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 a hypo). Also, pack some longer-acting carbohydrate, such as biscuits, crackers or dried fruit.
- » 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, declare it at the security checkpoint and inform security staff that your pump 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.



## 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 seat belt 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 a 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).

Most costs can be recovered through your travel insurance when you get home. You must have declared your diabetes as a pre-existing condition before your trip to be able to claim any medical expenses related to diabetes that occurred during your trip.

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

## The NDSS and you

The NDSS provides a range of services to help you manage your diabetes. These include our Infoline and website for advice on diabetes management, NDSS products and a range of support programs to help you learn more about managing your diabetes.

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