

# Travel

## and diabetes

Travel can and should be fun and having diabetes doesn't mean your travelling days are over. With good planning, there's no reason why your trip won't be safe, fun and hassle-free whether it is within Australia or overseas.

### What planning tips do you have?

- Try to estimate what medication, test strips, insulin and syringes you will need for the entire trip and pack more than you need in case of loss or damage. If possible, pack a spare meter.
- Take clearly written details of your next of kin or family member plus your National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) card just in case.
- If you are taking insulin or diabetes tablets, carry some form of quick acting carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets or jelly beans in case of a 'hypo' plus some biscuits or dried fruit. Refer to the *Hypoglycaemia and Diabetes* information sheet.
- Insulin and blood glucose test strips are stable at room temperature under 30 degrees. They will be damaged by temperature extremes so must not be frozen or left in the sun or heat for any length of time. If you are likely to be in very hot or cold places, take a small insulated bag which you can buy from Diabetes Australia.
- Take a small approved sharps container (available from Diabetes Australia or your pharmacy) for your used lancets and syringes. You can then dispose of it when you come across a sharps disposal service, offered by many hotels and most airports.
- Accuracy of blood glucose results is also affected by temperature at the time of operation. As temperature ranges vary for conducting a test, consult your meter user manual for your meter's operational temperature range.
- Wear some form of medical identification that says you have diabetes.
- When travelling long distances, try to take regular meal breaks and some form of physical activity.
- The excitement of the trip may affect your blood glucose levels so check your levels more often. If you're using insulin, always have a 'hypo pack' with you and know how to adjust your dose. Discuss with your doctor or diabetes educator.
- Carry a small first aid kit with you in case of aches and pains, minor cuts and burns.
- Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes.

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### If travelling by air

- Carry all your medication, insulin, Glucagon, delivery devices and testing equipment in your carry-on luggage, preferably split between two of your bags in case one goes missing. Unless you are travelling alone, it is a good idea to give one bag to your travelling partner to carry.
- Pack a separate small bag with the bare minimum of insulin, injection devices, testing equipment and hypo treatment needed for the flight. If taking a long flight, pack enough for the first sector and refill it before each new sector.

### What about overseas travel?

If you're planning a trip overseas, you will need to think about allowing for different foods, how to cope with changes in time zones, possibly vaccinations and extreme climates. You will also need to be well prepared for mishaps such as long delays and misplaced baggage.

The following pages offer tips and practical advice to help you plan your overseas trip. You can use the table on the back page as a check-list and tick off each item as you complete it.

### Before you go overseas

There are many things to consider before you leave, such as airline regulations, a well-timed itinerary, in-flight needs and being prepared for that 'what-if' situation. Good planning is the key.

### Making your bookings

- Try to arrange for arrival and departure at times of the day that suit you and allow plenty of time for your travel connections.
- When booking your flights, you may choose to tell the airline you have diabetes. This will be passed on to the cabin crew who are trained in meeting your needs during the flight.
- In general, 'diabetic' meals served in-flight can be quite bland and no longer necessary. However you may choose to order meals that are low in saturated fat and high in fibre and carbohydrate at the time you make your bookings.

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### Staying well during your travels

- At least two months before leaving, talk to your doctor about your travel plans. It is important to discuss your medication/insulin adjustments, Glucagon and testing for ketones during the trip. This is also a good time to arrange the papers you will need to comply with airline regulations. (See page 4.)
- If your planned trip has different time zones, discuss this too. What you do will depend on your medications and/or your type of insulin. Your doctor may advise you to follow your normal routine until you stop travelling, have a long sleep and then start from scratch when you wake up. On the other hand, you may be given specific information about any medication or insulin changes you may need.
- During long hauls, support hose can help to prevent swelling and may reduce the risk of clotting in the veins of the legs. Check first with your diabetes health care team if this is okay for you.
- Important information about any vaccinations required can be obtained from your doctor or specialised travel medical centre. They will also advise you of other tablets you may need to take with you just in case, to treat diarrhoea or nausea. Helpful websites include:
  - [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au)
  - [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
  - [www.tmvc.com.au](http://www.tmvc.com.au)
  - [www.travelclinic.com.au](http://www.travelclinic.com.au)
  - [www.travelhealth.com.au](http://www.travelhealth.com.au).

### Making the most of travel insurance

You should have travel insurance, both for your health and your belongings. Make sure your accident and health cover applies both to pre-existing conditions and the places you will visit. Contact Diabetes Australia for more information on 1300 136 588.

The Australian Government has arrangements with a range of countries providing travellers with benefits similar to Medicare if needed, but only for acute or emergency care. For information, call Medicare Australia on 6124 6333 or visit their website [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au). And don't forget to pack your Medicare card.

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### Complying with airline security regulations

Be sure to make arrangements in advance so that you comply with Australian airline security regulations specifically for people with diabetes. These are:

- All diabetes supplies including testing equipment, insulin and Glucagon delivery devices (syringes and pen needles) must be carried in your hand luggage.
- Your name must appear on all insulin and/or Glucagon script labels.
- Carry scripts for all medications and check them before you go to make sure they are readable. Each script must include your name, the name and type of your medication and your doctor's contact details.
- Carry several copies of a letter from your doctor (check beforehand that it is readable) which you will need to get through Customs. The letter should outline your medical conditions, the medications you take and the devices you use for your insulin and blood glucose testing, such as insulin pens, syringes and needles or pump unit. It should also stress the importance of carrying your medications with you.

**If you are not travelling with an Australian carrier, be sure to check in advance with your chosen airline for specific security guidelines.**

### At the airport

- Arrive early to avoid rushing.
- It is considered unlikely that insulin would be harmed by exposure to x-rays in security equipment. However, if you are concerned, you may ask airport security staff to physically check you and your baggage rather than you and your baggage going through the x-ray equipment. Security staff members are obliged to respond to such a request under regulations administered by the responsible Federal agency, the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

### During the flight

- You may decide to tell the flight attendant at the start of the trip that you have diabetes so your needs are well catered for. However, this is personal choice.
- Keep your diabetes supplies where you can reach them immediately even if the seat belt sign is on, perhaps in the seat pocket in front of you, not under the seat or in the overhead locker.
- Always wait until your meal is on the table in front of you before giving insulin. For added safety, you can take your insulin halfway through or immediately after your meal in case there is a major unforeseen interruption.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Drink enough water to avoid thirst and becoming dehydrated.
- Sleep whenever possible and ask the cabin crew to wake you for meals.
- Wear comfortable shoes and exercise your feet to help prevent swelling.
- 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 under control.

### What if something goes wrong while I'm away?

With all that planning, this is most unlikely. However, don't panic - seek medical assistance when required, if possible with advice from your travel insurer. Most costs can be recovered through health benefits or through your own medical insurance when you get home.

**With careful planning and taking a few precautions, there is no reason why your diabetes should stop you from having a trip that is memorable and hassle-free. Use the checklist on the following page to help you in your planning. Enjoy and bon voyage!**

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### Handy checklist

<b>Three months prior to departure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan travel itinerary</li> <li>• Check airline regulations</li> <li>• Check travel insurance requirements</li> <li>• Check vaccination requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Make bookings</li> <li>– Action as required</li> <li>– Arrange insurance for health and belongings</li> <li>– See websites listed page 3</li> </ul>
<b>Two months prior to departure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make appointment to have vaccinations (if required)</li> <li>• Make appointment with GP or diabetes educator</li> <li>• List and buy any special clothing items required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Discuss other 'travel' tablets required</li> <li>– Discuss travel plans, time zones etc</li> <li>– Eg: Comfortable, well fitting shoes</li> </ul>
<b>One month prior to departure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange all paperwork required</li> <li>• Arrange all diabetes medication and testing devices required for entire trip</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Letter from your doctor</li> <li>– Scripts for all medications</li> <li>– Check labelling</li> <li>– Written details next of kin</li> <li>– NDSS and Medicare cards</li> <li>– Medication, insulin, syringes/ pen needles or pump and consumables, lancets, test strips, meter (+ spare if possible), Glucagon and delivery devices</li> </ul>
<b>Two weeks prior to departure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check and arrange all other medical requirements</li> <li>• Pack carry-on luggage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Medical identification</li> <li>– Hypo pack</li> <li>– Insulated insulin bag (if required)</li> <li>– Small sharps container</li> <li>– Small first-aid kit</li> <li>– Split medications between two carry-on bags</li> <li>– Pack small separate 'one-sector' bag</li> </ul>

### Would you like to join Australia's leading diabetes organisation?

- Product discounts
- Dietary services
- Free magazines
- Support groups
- Educational literature
- Children's services

**For more information phone 1300 136 588**

**Website: [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)**

**Multilingual information: [www.multilingualdiabetes.org.au](http://www.multilingualdiabetes.org.au)**

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