

Travel & Diabetes

Information for Young People

Having diabetes doesn't mean you can't travel. Planning is the key to a having a great trip.

It is a good idea to make an appointment with your diabetes doctor and educator around 4 – 6 weeks before you leave. You will need to get a **letter** from your doctor containing your **medical history**. This can be given to a doctor if you need to seek medical attention while you are away. You also need to develop a 'plan' for looking after your diabetes during the trip.

If traveling by air you will also need a **doctor's letter to carry with your medications** in case you are asked to produce '**proof of need**' for your medications and supplies. Your National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) card can also be used as '**proof of need**'.

Your 'plan' will need to take into account the following situations:

- the length of the journey
- the possibility of delays
- the timing between insulin injections and meals
- the availability of carbohydrate foods
- access to medical services and diabetes supplies
- changes in the usual diet
- changes in activity levels
- changes in meal and sleep routines (especially when crossing time zones)
- a plan for managing illness when away from home.

Overseas Travel

From the 31st of July, 2007 new regulations were introduced regarding restrictions of carry on items such as liquids, aerosols and gels on board flights in and out of Australia. These new rules also apply when transiting on international flights within Australia.

Prescription Medications and Medical Devices

Prescription medicines (e.g. insulin) and prescribed medical devices (e.g. Blood Glucose Monitor) **are allowed** to be taken in your carry-on baggage. As stated earlier you must provide 'proof of need' for these items. **Either a doctor's letter or NDSS card can be used for this.**

Non-prescription medications

For non-prescription medications (e.g. Panadol) you may only take on board the amount you will require for the flight.

Taking Medications through the Security Check

Ensure you have your medications sealed in a 20 X 20 cm clear plastic zip-lock bag. When you are about to go through the security check tell the security officer that you are carrying medications. The plastic bag containing your medications should be removed from your hand luggage and placed separately on the X-ray conveyer belt. Keep your doctor's letter with your medications as you may be asked to produce evidence that your medications are essential.

The name on the label of the medications **must** match the name on your boarding pass. Some airlines suggest that you also travel with copies of your prescriptions as well. Before traveling contact the airline you are traveling on to see if they have any other requirements.

For more detailed information regarding carry-on luggage go to the Australian Government – Department of Transport and Regional Service website.
www.dotars.gov.au.

Developing a 'Plan' for Managing Your Diabetes During the Flight

Your diabetes educator will be happy to assist you in developing a 'plan' for your flight (as well as for the rest of your trip). To assist with this it is a good idea to get a copy of the 'flight' plan which contains the departure and arrival dates and times. Airlines can also give approximate times and the number of meals that will be served during the flight. They can even provide you with a meal menu if needed.

Adjustment to insulin doses for the flight can be managed in several ways but will depend on the time of departure and the duration of the flight e.g. if going to New Zealand which is a 4 hour flight, you probably don't need to make any changes to your usual insulin routine.

Insulin adjustment on long flights

The following suggestions apply to young people who are on **2 to 4 injections of insulin** a day:

- Keep your watch on the time of the place of departure (origin) and keep to the usual routine e.g. if on two injection per day eat at approximately the same times as usual. You may need to carry some extra carbohydrate to make this possible.
- If taking 4 injections a day, give pre-meal rapid/short-acting insulin during the flight
- Give the intermediate/long-acting insulin as the passengers are settling for sleep.
- Once you have arrived at your destination then give insulin and food according to the local time.

Traveling with an insulin pump

Having an insulin pump can make blood glucose control easier when you travel. You can adjust boluses for meals that come at odd hours or are larger or smaller than usual. If you don't want to eat a meal then you just don't give a meal bolus. You can also make adjustments for your lack of activity/exercise during the flight.⁴ If you usually have multiple basal rates you may wish to use a temporary basal rate during the flight. You need to discuss the various options with your doctor or educator before you go.

Some More Tips for Traveling

- Carry some form of ID that you have diabetes especially if traveling alone
- Insulin should **never be stopped** for any reason
- Do extra BGL's during your flight
- Generally no insulin adjustment is needed if flying north or south
- Extra insulin may be required for westward travel as the day will be much longer and extra meals will require extra insulin
- If you are traveling with someone it is a good idea to keep one watch on the local time where you departed from and one on the local time at your destination
- Be prepared to give extra doses of rapid/short-acting insulin if the BGL is high
- Be prepared for unexpected 'hypo's. Carry 'hypo' food with you at all times.
- You may need to carry extra carbohydrate with you as well as 'hypo' food.
- If carrying fresh food or fruit you will need to declare it to customs. If you are re-entering Australia you will need to **declare all foods** that you are carrying. It is an offence to carry undeclared foods into Australia.
- Don't ask for a 'diabetic diet' on your flights as you may be given a meal that contains little carbs
- There is no need to adjust insulin regimens if you are on a short flight or if flying to some Asian cities where there is only a small time difference e.g. 2 -4 hrs
- It is very important to buy travel insurance before you go, particularly if you are traveling overseas. Contact your local Diabetes Australia office for the name of travel insurance companies that handle policies for people with diabetes
- A list of recommended medical facilities (if possible, contact names of doctors) in the counties/cities that you will be visiting will help you access medical care if needed.

Diabetes Supplies

- Make sure that you have plenty of extra supplies of insulin and BG testing strips as these are not always readily available in other countries. They also may be called something different and may be very expensive
- You may need to insulate your insulin to protect it from extreme temperatures during your travel
- It is a good idea to have your supplies divided into two bags in case one bag is lost

- Insulin should never be placed in the hold of the plane due to the risk of exposure from extreme temperatures
- If you are using insulin pens don't forget to pack some insulin syringes in case the pen breaks
- Make sure you pack strips to test either urine or blood ketones.
- If you own two (2) blood glucose meters it is a good idea to take both of them with you particularly if you are traveling overseas (packed in separate bag's of course).

Diabetes Supplies (on an insulin pump)

- You will need to pack some insulin syringes (or pens) as well as rapid acting and long/intermediate acting insulin in case of pump failure.
- Make sure you pack extra batteries, infusion sets and other pump supplies
- Make sure you have basal and bolus rates written down in case of pump failure. You will also need a plan for converting to insulin injections if needed.
- Take the telephone number of your pump helpline with you.
- It is important to note that the metal detectors at the security checks will **not** harm your pump or the insulin in the pump.
- If you are using a Medtronic pump you need turn off your remote control while on board the aircraft.
- 'Real Time' blood glucose sensors can not be used on board aircraft and will need to be disconnected.
- If you have a Medtronic insulin pump you can download a Medical Device Information Card from their website that can be carried with you and shown to security officers at security checks (more information go to www.medtronic.com.au).

References

1. Clinical practice guidelines: *Type 1 diabetes in children and adolescents*. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government, March, 2005; 207-209.
2. Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services website: www.dotars.gov.au
3. Ambler G., Barron V., May C., Ambler E., Cameron F., *Caring for Diabetes in Children and Adolescents. A Parents Manual*. Sydney, Combined Children's Diabetes Services of NSW, National Capital Printing, Australia, 2001
4. Traveling with a Pump. Medtronic Minimed Patient Information.