

THE DIABETES TRAVEL GUIDE!

Travelling, whether it is for work or holidays, should be enjoyable. If you have diabetes, a little extra preparation can help make your trip one to remember, for all the right reasons!

This fact sheet provides general information on confident, trouble-free travelling for diabetes. Be prepared to adapt the information to suit individual circumstances, which will depend on:

- how far away and for how long you intend to travel.
- how remote from standard “westernized” doctors and equipment you will be.
- how stable your diabetes is and how quickly it responds to treatment for high and low blood glucose levels.
- whether you intend to do lots of physical activity or be more sedentary.

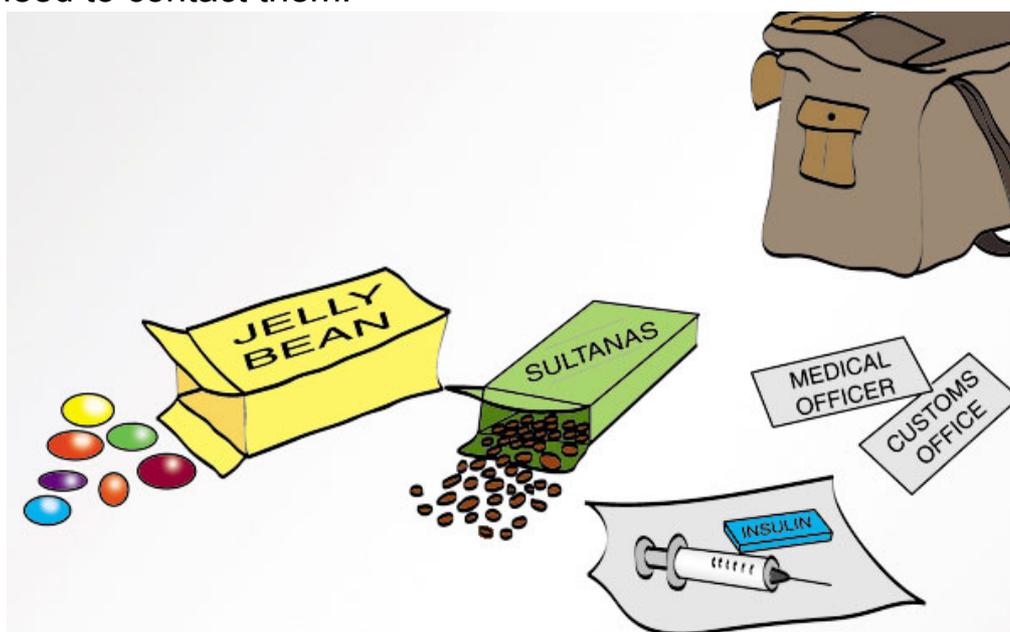


The travel checklist

See your doctor at least 6 weeks before you leave so that you can:

- have your diabetes control assessed and treatment modified if necessary.
- have any necessary immunizations and check tetanus cover.
- obtain sufficient prescriptions for insulin, oral hypoglycemic agents and keto-diastix (if on insulin).
- discuss whether or not you require antibiotics, tablets for diarrhoea or glucagon injection.

- discuss the effects of time changes on your diabetes routine.
- obtain a list of generic names of relevant medications as brand names may differ elsewhere.
- obtain a list of names of contact doctors, hospitals and clinics in the countries you will visit.
- obtain a letter of introduction to doctors overseas, outlining your treatment and any other health problems. Another letter will be needed stating you have diabetes and authorizing your need to carry syringes, medication etc. Note that some countries in Asia, such as Indonesia, require a letter of introduction verified by the Consulate staff if you are visiting their country. Check with individual Consulates.
- make sure you have your doctors correct contact details in case you need to contact them.

**Buy:**

- sufficient syringes, strips for meters and other accessories, and if necessary, find out where to buy them overseas.
- anti-diarrhoea / motion sickness medication if advised by your doctor.
- first aid supplies, such as antiseptic, bandages, antifungal cream, scissors, sunscreen, insect repellent, tissues, cotton wool, thermometer etc.

- small travel clock.
- a suitable storage container for insulin to protect it from heat eg. a polystyrene container (such as those used for baby's bottles) or a square of "Space Blanket" from camping shops.

Check that your ID card or SOS disc is in good condition and up to date.

Inform the airline / tour group etc that you have diabetes and request appropriate meals.

Arrange travel insurance, as medical costs overseas can be high.

Packing

Make sure you keep your insulin and any other medical supplies such as syringes, glucagon and test strips with you in your hand luggage. Don't place your insulin in the aircraft fridge as it could easily be lost.

Pack some emergency carbohydrate food eg. dried fruit, jelly beans, dry biscuits as departures can be delayed.

In flight

Consider time changes and your usual diabetes routine

- Insulin and meals should be taken according to **the current time at the place where the flight started**, not according to the time of the country of destination.
- Once you have reached your destination, change your insulin and meal times to local time.
- If you are only crossing a time difference of 3-4 hours (eg. SouthEast Asia, New Zealand), you simply need a slightly earlier (or later) injection.

- If you are crossing a time difference of more than 3-4 hours (eg. Europe, USA), it is best to discuss a management plan with your doctor before you leave.
- Wearing 2 watches, one set on home time and one on destination time, can be helpful for the first few days until routine has been adjusted.

Consider lack of physical activity in flight:

- High blood glucose levels are likely to occur due to lack of physical activity.
- Keep a check of blood glucose levels and have some additional quick acting insulin if needed.
- Any stop-over can be used for some rapid walking around the terminal.

Consider changes to meals

- Fortunately, meals and snacks are served frequently on all international flights.
- Make sure you inform the airline of your dietary requirements when you book your flight. This can be checked a few days ahead of the flight by a phone call to the airline.
- Remember that extra carbohydrate foods, such as bread rolls, biscuits and fruit are usually not readily available.
- If you have not prepared for stop overs by carrying extra snacks, take some supplies from the plane.
- Avoid alcohol before and during flights in order to prevent dehydration, high blood glucose levels and fatigue.

Handy hints

If camping / backpacking / hostelling:

- Never go alone.
- Inform someone when you are going and your expected return time.
- Take a mobile phone.
- Keep insulin with you at all times. If air temperature is likely to be over 35°C, store in a coolpack or thermos filled with cottonwool. If air temperature is likely to be below 5°C, carry insulin close to body.
- Take extra food in case of unforeseen delays eg. dried fruit and nuts, muesli bars, fruit, juice boxes.

If hiking / trekking:

- Have regular breaks to check blood glucose levels and have a snack if needed.
- Pace yourself with a partner.
- Plan ahead and reduce insulin dose if more active than usual.
- Prepare for possible hypos.
- Rest if unwell.

Footcare:

- Never go barefoot.
- “Break in” new shoes before the trip to prevent blisters – plan for comfort, not fashion!
- Wear sandals or surf sandals at the beach to prevent injury.

- In the event of blisters, cover with a sterile pad – don't break them.
- Clean, dry and inspect feet every day.
- During a flight, wear lace up shoes to allow feet to expand, avoid tight garters or elastic socks, and do foot and ankle exercise.
- If trekking, wear 2 pairs of socks.



Preparation is the key to successful travelling when you have diabetes. See your doctor before the trip in order to address any issues that are relevant to your trip.



Extra supplies, including insulin, test strips and carbohydrate food, are a necessity. Make sure you know where supplies can be obtained at your destination, if needed.



Blood glucose levels can be affected by flying and by changes to time, meals and activity levels when travelling. Monitor blood glucose levels regularly and be prepared to adjust insulin accordingly.