

Traveling with Diabetes

Camping or cruising, flying or floating, you can travel wherever you want – it just takes a little planning ahead to handle your diabetes.^{1,2} Use the following information as a guide to your travel plans. These tips can help you pack and travel smoothly with the least risk to your health:

- Start by seeing your doctor. You will need to have two papers from your doctor before you travel:
 - a letter explaining what you need to do for your diabetes, such as taking diabetes pills or insulin shots; a listing of medication and medical devices you need (e.g., insulin, syringes); and a listing of any allergies you have or any foods or medicines to which you are sensitive.
 - a prescription for insulin or diabetes pills. You should take more than enough insulin and syringes or pills to last through your trip, but the prescription could help in case of an emergency. Prescription laws may differ from state to state and country to country, so be sure and check your destination and talk with your doctor about this as well.¹
 - Pack at least twice as much medication and supplies as you think you need. Pack at least half of it to keep with you at all times (e.g., carry-on bag or backpack). Pack this bag with the following:
 - enough insulin and syringes for the trip;
 - your glucose meter with extra batteries and plenty of test strips;
 - supplies, such as glucose tablets or gel, to treat low blood sugar;
 - a well-wrapped, air-tight snack pack of crackers and cheese, peanut butter, fruit, a juice box, and some form of sugar (hard candy or glucose tablets) to treat low blood sugar or become a meal if the next restaurant is far away or a flight has delays;
 - other medications or medical supplies, such as glucogen, medicines for diarrhea or upset stomach, or antibiotic ointment.^{1,2}
 - Notify the security screener at the airport that you have diabetes and are carrying your supplies. You have the option of a visual inspection of your supplies rather than x-ray inspection, but you must let the security personnel know before screening begins. Be sure to separate your medical supplies from other property and toiletries. If these supplies are not clearly visible, then x-ray screening will be required.³ For more information on traveling by plane with your supplies, see [Traveling with Diabetes Supplies](#).
 - Wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace that shows you have diabetes.
 - If traveling abroad, learn to say “I have diabetes” and “sugar or orange juice, please” in the language or languages of the countries you’ll visit.
 - If traveling by plane, request a special meal low in sugar, fat, or cholesterol. Make this request at least two days before your flight. Wait until you see your meal coming down the aisle before taking your shot (a delay in the meal could mean low blood sugar – always carry some food with you).¹
- “Blood sugar levels are best managed in transit by frequent testing and adjustment of food intake and drug dosages as needed.”⁴



- Do blood checks often. Excitement, as well as changes in exercise/activity patterns and diet, can cause blood sugar levels to change. By checking often, you can make adjustments in your eating, exercise, and insulin dosage.
- Keep track of what you eat. Trying new foods can be part of a traveling experience, but if they upset your diabetes control, it will be good to remember what effects it has so you can make adjustments the next time you want to eat it.²
- If travel plans incur time changes of more than a few hours, people with diabetes, especially those taking insulin, should consult with their doctor on how best to schedule the timing of their medications or injections.⁴

When traveling with insulin, you will also need to give some thought to its storage.

- Insulin doesn't have to be refrigerated, but it should be kept in a cool, dry place. If it is stored in extreme heat or cold, insulin may lose its strength. "If you are traveling in hot temperatures, store your insulin in an insulated bag or cooled thermos. In extremely hot conditions, you can freeze water in plastic bottles and keep these in your insulated bag along with your insulin and food supplies. When melted, the water can then serve as drinking water."⁵ Frio cool packs are also available to keep insulin cool. "If you are skiing, camping, or working in a cold climate, keep your insulin close to your body or an insulated bag to



keep it from freezing."⁵ Don't pack insulin in your trunk or glove compartment. If you travel by car or bike, or carry your insulin in a backpack or cycle bag; travel packs are available to keep your insulin cool.¹

Don't forget to take care of your feet. Traveling can put a lot of miles on the feet.

- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Never go barefoot.
- Check your feet every day to look for blisters, cuts, redness, swelling, and scratches. Get medical care at the first signs of infection or inflammation.¹

Planning a trip can be exciting...and stressful. Be sure you have everything you need before you go. Though your diabetes goes with you, it doesn't have to limit the possibilities for adventure and enjoyment.

Sources:

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3. American Diabetes Association (2006) Traveling with diabetes supplies [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From http://www.diabetes.org/advocacy-and-legalresources/discrimination/public_accommodation/travel.jsp.
4. Merck & Company (2003). Travel and health: Merck manual home edition [on-line]. Retrieved February 22, 2008. From <http://www.merck.com/mmhe/print/sec25/ch303/ch303a.html>.
5. Canadian Diabetes Association (2008). Travel tips for people with diabetes [on-line]. Retrieved April 8, 2008. From http://www.diabetes.ca/Section_About/travelkit.asp#insulin-storage-and-use.