

Health Tips for Travelers

Pack Your Bags

What to take with you for health & medical purposes

“Expect the best, but prepare for the worst should be the official traveler’s motto.”¹ When you pack your bags, you will want to take a traveler’s health kit containing:

- general items for first aid and minor health care, and
- prescription medications or medical supplies for pre-existing medical conditions.

Minor First Aid

Prevention & protection

General first aid items should be available in your traveler’s health kit to take care of minor problems as they occur. These items should include:

- adhesive bandages
- sterile dressing/gauze
- ace bandage/wrap
- antiseptic wound cleaner
- cotton-tipped applicators
- antibiotic ointment
- hydrocortisone cream (1%)
- antifungal ointment
- Lubricating (emollient) eye drops
- Sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater)
- insect repellent (with 30%-50% DEET)
- insect bite treatment and Epi-Pen if needed for allergic reaction
- hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol)
- aloe gel for sunburn
- digital thermometer
- oral rehydration solution packets (in case of vomiting and/or dehydration)
- small tools like a mirror, scissors, tweezers, safety pins, and nail clippers (be sure to learn about [permitted and prohibited items](#))
- pain reliever/fever reducer (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen)

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- antihistamine
- decongestant
- cough suppressant/expectorant
- antidiarrheal medication
- mild laxative
- antacid
- throat lozenges
- anti-motion sickness medications
- anti-malarial medications, if applicable
- water disinfectant
- extra pair of contact lenses or eyeglasses, if applicable
- contact lens solution, if applicable
- personal prescriptions, sterile syringes and needles, and appropriate documentation, if needed (see the following for more information).^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7}



Pre-Existing Conditions Prescriptions & Medical Supplies

When packing personal prescriptions and medical supplies for pre-existing conditions, there is much you should know.

- Necessary prescription drugs should remain in their original bottles so that precise names of the drugs and the instructions for taking them can be reviewed in case of an emergency.



- Have the generic name of the drug, in addition to its brand name. The generic name of a drug is more useful than the brand name – brand names may differ among countries.
- Pack an extra supply of medications in carry-on bags in case checked bags are lost, stolen, or delayed in transit.
- Some drugs and devices, such as opioids, syringes, and large amounts of any drug are likely to raise suspicions among security personnel or customs officers. For this reason, travelers should carry a doctor's note explaining the medical needs for the supplies. **Note:** All doctor's notes should be signed and on letterhead paper.
- A traveler going abroad with a pre-existing medical condition should also carry a letter from his/her attending physician, describing the medical

condition, in addition to the necessary medications.

- Syringes should always be packed together with the drugs that are dispensed in them.
- Travelers should check with airports, airlines, and embassies to determine what additional documentation is helpful in making travel with these supplies least complicated.
- Travelers should also check with the foreign embassy of the country they are visiting to make sure any required medicine is not considered an illegal narcotic in that location.^{8,9}

Be aware of [permitted](#) and [prohibited](#) items, and pack accordingly. If traveling by air, follow the [3-1-1 rule](#), which allows for 3-ounce containers of liquid or gel, placed in 1 quart-sized plastic bag, and 1 bag per passenger. Know the exceptions (e.g., [breast milk](#), [formula](#), medication, etc.) and how to claim these at security check points. If you have a medical alert bracelet or necklace, please wear it.

Those who have underlying health problems – such as [diabetes](#), [heart disease](#), [lung disease](#), or [cancer](#), who are on any form of regular medication or treatment, who have recently had surgery or been hospitalized, or who are concerned about their fitness for travel for any other reason (e.g., [traveling while pregnant](#) or with [pacemakers](#), [implantable defibrillators](#), [implanted metal devices](#), or [coronary stents](#)) – should always consult their doctor for examination and information on travel necessities and precautions.¹⁰ Following are a few more recommendations that may help. In addition to preparing with appropriate medical supplies and medical history documents:

- Make sure you have had any recommended medical testing or screening before traveling.
- Wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace, if you have one (get one if your doctor recommends it for your condition).
- Request special meals (e.g., low fat, low salt, low cholesterol, etc.) if recommended by your doctor. Be sure to make this request at least 48 hours before your trip so you can be easily accommodated.
- Request other supplies well ahead of time, such as supplemental oxygen. This request must be arranged by you, but it is provided by an outside vendor or by the airline or cruise line, etc. Be sure to confirm arrangements 48 hours ahead of time to have supplies at all layovers and stoppages.
- Learn the language. If traveling abroad, learn enough of the language to ask for appropriate help should an emergency arise.
- Wear appropriate clothing that allows for comfort and treatment that you may require. This may include loose-fitting clothing for administration of insulin, compression stockings for healthy circulation, and comfortable shoes for support and protection of your feet.
- Know the signs of a problem. If you experience symptoms, report them and seek immediate medical care – don't wait.
- Always carry the phone numbers of your doctor(s) and family members.

If you have a medical alert bracelet or necklace, please wear it.

Infants & Children

Caring for your family while traveling

Traveling with infants and young children will require some advance planning on your part. Talk with your doctor about any necessary vaccines needed for your children, as well as the potential need for prophylactic (preventative) drugs and medicine for motion sickness. Pack additional items in your health kit for your children, such as diaper rash ointment, waterless hand sanitizer, hand wipes, water- and insect-proof ground sheet for play outside, oral rehydration solution packets, baby formula, and medications specific to your child's needs.¹¹

Note: Medications, baby formula and food, breast milk, and juice are allowed through airline security in reasonable quantities exceeding three ounces and are not required to be in a zip-top bag. All items including formula, breast milk, and juice will be inspected. You or your infant or toddler will not be asked to test or taste breast milk, formula, or juice. Security

officers, however, may test liquid exemptions (exempt items more than 3 ounces) for explosives.¹²

It is a good idea to inform children ahead of time about your travel plans. Make them aware of new concepts like air pressure, security check points, x-raying baggage, motion changes, laws in different countries, etc. Discuss your plans with your children, and talk about any concerns they may have. Adjust their sleep schedules as you would yours to account for changing time zones and “jet lag.”

Whether traveling by land or air, you should have your child in an age-appropriate car seat. Children less than 1 year old and 20 pounds must be rear-facing; children at least 20 pounds and 1 year old may be forward-facing. Children greater than 40 pounds can safely ride using the aircraft restraints,¹³ but you should use a booster seat (if the vehicle is equipped with lap/shoulder belts) in a car, bus, or train until they are 4'9" tall (usually between ages 8–12). All children under 13 years of age should ride in the rear seats of vehicles.¹³

These are just some of the tips to help you pack and plan ahead for healthy travels for you and your family. For more information, see the resources section below.



Medical Conditions, Disabilities, & Other Concerns

Resources to address your needs

People with specific medical conditions encounter special problems in transit. If you have heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, cancer, some other disability or hidden medical concern (e.g., pacemaker, defibrillator, other implanted medical device, or metal implant, supplemental oxygen needs, suppressed immune system, etc.), or are pregnant, you may want to refer to the following resources:

Medical Conditions & Specific Needs

Specific medical conditions and travel <http://www.merck.com/mmhe/sec25/ch303/ch303d.html>

Travelers with disabilities and medical conditions <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/index.shtm>

Finally, just like you (and likely more so) children need to move about. Allow children to get up or out and move at least every 2 hours. Don't forget to pack bags of toys, activity books, healthy snacks, and safe drinking water to keep your child occupied and comfortable during your travels.¹³

Child Safety Seat Guidelines

Use the following guidelines to determine the safest way for children to travel.

- Infants should be in a rear-facing child safety seat until at least 1 year **and** at least 20 pounds. It is recommended that children remain rear-facing until they reach the maximum weight or height allowed by the maker of the safety seat.
- Toddlers over 1 year old and between 20–40 pounds can be in a forward-facing child safety seat. Higher harness weight seats are now available.
- Children over 40 pounds and under 4'9" tall can be in a booster seat using the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt.
- Children over 4'9" tall usually fit safely in lap/shoulder belts.

See our [ABCs on Child Safety Seats](#) information sheet for more information.

Hidden disabilities http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1374.shtm

Mode of travel: Health considerations http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2007/9789241580397_2_eng.pdf

Advising travelers with specific needs <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh9-PregnancyTraveling.aspx>

Diabetes

Traveling with diabetes supplies http://www.diabetes.org/advocacy-and-legalresources/discrimination/public_accommodation/travel.jsp



Have insulin will fly: Diabetes management during air travel and time zone adjustment strategies <http://clinical.diabetesjournals.org/cgi/content/full/21/2/82>

When you travel <http://www.diabetes.org/pre-diabetes/travel/when-you-travel.jsp>

Heart Disease

Traveling with heart disease <http://www.medtogo.com/traveling-with-heart-disease.html>

This document is meant for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or other health care provider.

Guidelines for flying with heart disease <http://heartdisease.about.com/od/otherriskfactors/a/flyinghd.htm>

Cancer

Travel and cancer <http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk/ResourceSupport/Practicalissues/Travel>

Breast cancer: Airline travel during chemotherapy http://breastcancer.about.com/od/lifeduringtreatment/qt/metal_detec.htm

Pregnancy and Travel with Young Children

Travel during pregnancy http://medem.com/search/article_display.cfm?path=\\TANQUERAY\M_ContentItem&mstr=M_ContentItem/ZZZPBP3C87C.html&soc=ACOG&srch_typ=NAV_SERCH

Pregnancy, breast-feeding, and travel http://medem.com/search/article_display.cfm?path=\\TANQUERAY\M_ContentItem&mstr=M_ContentItem/ZZZ52JRE5BC.html&soc=CDC&srch_typ=NAV_SERCH

International travel with infants and young children <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh8-SafeInfantsChildren.aspx>

Important information on traveling with formula, breast milk, and juice <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/children/formula.shtm>

Travel Safety Tips http://medem.com/search/article_display.cfm?path=\\TANQUERAY\M_ContentItem&mstr=M_ContentItem/ZZZSV4Z3EBE.html&soc=AAP&srch_typ=NAV_SERCH



Take Necessary Precautions for Your Journey

Keep supplies close at hand

A final reminder about health supplies... Medications, medical supplies, and health kits are useful only if they are available. They should be carried with the traveler at all times (e.g., in carry-on baggage, when allowable, and on excursions). All medications, especially prescription medications, should be stored in carry-on baggage, in their original containers with clear labels. With heightened airline security, sharp objects and some liquids and gels will have to remain in checked luggage.²

Remember, "it is the traveler's responsibility to ask for information, to understand the risks involved, and to take the necessary precautions for the journey."⁵

To view the references used in this newsletter, go to:
<http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2008/may/ref.php>

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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:

1. American Diabetes Association (2008). When you travel [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From <http://www.diabetes.org/pre-diabetes/travel/when-you-travel.jsp>.
2. American Diabetes Association (2003). On the go with diabetes [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From <http://diabetes.org/uedocuments/OnTheGo.pdf>.
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.

Traveling with Heart Disease

If you are a patient with heart disease, you should still be able to travel;¹ however, there are some exceptions.

People with the following heart complications are advised not to travel:

- people with angina pectoris,
- people with heart failure or rhythm disturbances that cause symptoms at rest with minimal exertion,
- people who have had a heart attack within the past 14 days, and
- people who have had a heart attack causing shock or heart failure within the past eight weeks.²

Individuals should not fly if:

- they have had a heart attack (myocardial infarction) within the past two weeks;
- they have had coronary artery stent placement within the past two weeks;
- they have had coronary artery bypass surgery within the past three weeks (longer if they have had pulmonary complications); or
- they have unstable angina, poorly controlled heart failure, or uncontrolled arrhythmias.³

Planning ahead, knowing your limits, and knowing what to do if symptoms are present can allow for enjoyable travels with the least risk to your health...in fact appropriate actions can be lifesaving.¹

Before you travel:

- Talk to your doctor to see if any pre-travel testing may be warranted to assure that the cardiac disease is stable.
- Carry adequate supplies of prescribed medicine.
- Carry a copy of your medical history, including a recent electrocardiogram, EKG, and treadmill stress test, if available, as well as results of angiograms, stents, and by-pass surgery.¹



- Carry phone numbers for your doctor(s) and family members.
- During flight, consider wearing compression stockings, pass on the alcohol, and drink plenty of fluids to avoid blood clots.³
- If traveling by plane, request a special low-fat, low-sodium, low-cholesterol meal. Make this request at least two days before your flight.

During travel, know the symptoms to watch for, and seek medical help if you have any of the following:

- chest pain;
- irregular pulse or one unusually fast (greater than 100 beats per minute) or very slow (lower than 50 beats per minute);
- shortness of breath;
- light-headedness, dizziness;
- unusual fatigue;
- unusual swelling of the legs and/or feet;
- generalized feeling of illness;
- unusual fatigue; or
- sharp back pain in the mid to lower quadrant.¹

If you have any symptoms, don't wait – seek immediate medical attention. It is better to have a “false alarm” than to wait it out, which may result in more dire consequences. Talk with your doctor(s) before you travel so you can know how to handle any medical emergency in your mode of travel and/or at your destination should it arise.

Sources:

1. MedtoGo (2008). Traveling with heart disease [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From <http://medtogo.com/traveling-with-heart-disease.html>.
2. 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>.
3. Fogoros, R. (2007). Guidelines for flying with heart disease [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From <http://heartdisease.about.com/od/otherriskfactors/a/flyinghd.htm>.

Traveling with Lung Disease

Travelers with lung disease often need specific help because of the need for supplemental oxygen. Supplemental oxygen at each stage of travel is the responsibility of the individual and not the airline, cruise line, or other travel service. For this reason, it will be important for you to do advance planning to arrange for oxygen in flight, at your destination, and during flight changes or other modes of travel.

The following information from the Merck Manual's On-line Library¹ may be helpful to consider when deciding your mode of travel and oxygen needs.

"Travelers with lung cysts, severe emphysema, a large collection of fluid around the lungs (pleural effusion), recent chest surgery, or recent lung collapse can develop complications from airplane pressure changes and should not fly without approval from their doctor.

Other travelers with lung disease may need supplemental oxygen while aboard an airplane. A doctor determines a person's need for in-flight oxygen by measuring the level of oxygen in the blood. Airlines will provide in-flight oxygen if given a doctor's prescription and 48-hours' notice; travelers are not allowed to carry oxygen in any form aboard an airplane. Travelers who need oxygen during airport layovers must make their own arrangements, although most oxygen vendors will assist their regular customers without charge. Other respiratory equipment, such as continuous positive airway pressure devices, can be accommodated on an airplane provided the equipment does not exceed the size allowed for carry-on luggage. However, travelers who need this equipment should allow extra time for security checks.

Travel at high altitudes may present special problems because there is less oxygen available than at sea level. In general, people with mild or moderate lung problems do not experience any difficulty at altitudes below 5,000 feet, but the greater the altitude, the greater the chance of problems. People with lung disease traveling in or through such areas should

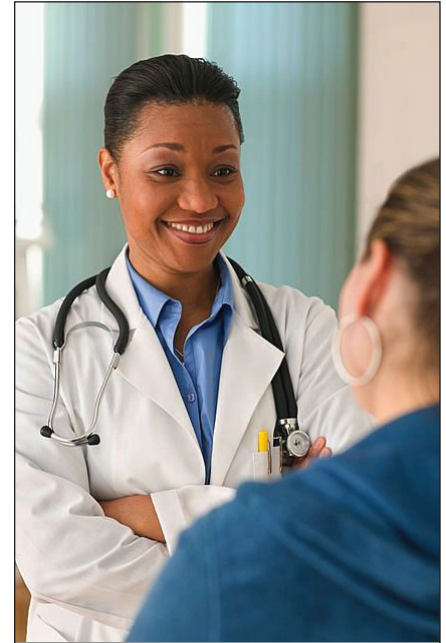
take the same precautions that they would if they were flying.

Bus, train, car, and ship travel is safe for people with lung disease but requires planning to ensure a supply of oxygen. Commercial services can coordinate oxygen deliveries for travelers anywhere in the world.

People with asthma, emphysema, or bronchitis may find that their symptoms worsen in cities where air pollution is significant. They may need additional treatments from their inhalers or additional drugs, such as corticosteroids, to control symptoms adequately."¹

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)² also offers these tips for travelers needing supplemental oxygen:

- **Travel on non-stop or direct flights.** Because many airlines base their oxygen charges on the number of segments in a trip, using non-stop or direct flights may save money. If you need oxygen service on the ground but have a direct flight, you may be able to stay on the plane during stops in order to receive a continuous supply of oxygen.
- **Find out what equipment is available.** Equipment varies, even among planes in the same airline. Verify that your prescribed flow rate can be provided. On most airplanes, supplemental oxygen can be used only in certain seats.
- **Arrange for oxygen on the ground.** Airlines do not provide supplemental oxygen service in airport terminals.



- **Shop around for the best total price.** Charges for supplemental oxygen vary by airline and by oxygen supply companies that service airports. If an oxygen company representative needs to meet your plane, you may be charged more if you travel outside of normal business hours.
- **Plan ahead.** Most airlines request two weeks notice that supplemental oxygen will be needed, although some will accommodate requests made only 48 hours in advance.
- **Get answers.** If the ticket agent cannot answer all of your questions, speak to someone in the airline's medical or special services department.
- **Bring your nasal cannula.** Some airlines provide only masks.
- **Confirm all arrangements** 48 hours before your flight.
- **Arrive early.** Unfortunately, mistakes happen. If last-minute arrangements have to be made because of miscommunications among the reservations agent, the medical office, and the ground crew, arriving 90 minutes or more before your flight is scheduled to leave can give the airline a chance to obtain and install the oxygen tank so you can travel as planned.
- **Carry extra copies of your doctor's letter.** The airport first aid station may have oxygen available

if you have an unexpected layover or get stranded, but you will need to provide your doctor's instructions.

- **Get help.** Travel is tiring; just because you *can* walk the length of the terminal, doesn't mean you *should*. Don't hesitate to use the airport's wheelchair services, baggage assistance, and mobile carts. Carry small bills to tip service providers.²

Traveling with lung disease requires some advance planning, but it doesn't have to stop you from traveling. Discuss your condition with your doctor – how best to travel and with what supplies. Then, make arrangements, confirm them in advance, and enjoy your trip.

Sources:

1. 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>.
2. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2003). American Thoracic Society (ATS) public advisory roundtable (PAR) members discuss barriers faced by patients requiring supplemental oxygen during air travel [on-line]. Retrieved April 4, 2008. From <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/public/sept03/corner.htm#par>.

Traveling with Cancer

Going on a trip during cancer treatment can be a welcome break, but it also may require some forward planning.

Like all travel with a medical condition, you will want to have a letter from your doctor detailing your treatment as well as appropriate prescriptions and medications available.

- If you have an implanted port or under-the-skin pump, carry an identification card for the device, or ask your doctor for a letter describing the type, purpose, and location of the device (on letterhead and signed by the physician). Show this information to personnel when passing through security metal detectors.
- If you have a tissue expander (such as is used in breast reconstruction), it may contain a magnet, which helps your surgeon find the valve to add saline. Again, you will require an ID card or letter from your surgeon.
- If you need to carry injectable medicine, have a letter from your doctor (stating the reason for the medicine and medical devices). Separate these items from your other baggage and toiletries so they can easily be screened.
- If you have a low immunity due to leukaemia, lymphoma, or because of recent cancer treatment (such as removal of your spleen), you may need to take a supply of antibiotics with you.¹

Some people with cancer may be advised not to travel by air under particular circumstances, as oxygen levels and air pressures change at high altitudes.

You may be advised not to fly if you:

- are breathless;
- are anemic (have a low number of red blood cells);
- are at risk of developing an increased pressure or swelling in the brain (cerebral oedema) due to a brain tumor;

- have recently had surgery or a medical procedure, as this can introduce gas into the body that may expand to cause pain and stretch your wound; air travel should be avoided for 10 days after any surgery;
- have recently had surgery to your chest; air travel should be avoided for 3-4 weeks after chest surgery; after chest surgery, you should have a chest x-ray to make sure that your lungs are fully expanded before flying;
- have recently had surgery to your brain; or
- have problems with your ears or sinuses, where pressure changes may make symptoms worse.²



“Some people with cancer have a higher risk of developing blood clots (thromboses or DVTs) than other people. There are a few reasons for this. One is that people with cancer often have slightly higher numbers of platelets in their blood. Platelets are cells that help the blood to clot. People with cancer may also have slightly higher amounts of clotting factors. Clotting factors are proteins that are produced naturally in the body and work with the platelets to form blood clots and prevent bleeding. People with cancer also sometimes have lower levels of natural blood thinning proteins (anticoagulant) in their blood, especially if the cancer is affecting their liver.”²

- The risk of developing a blood clot is higher in particular types of cancer. Some types of lung,

stomach, or bowel cancer produce a substance called mucin, which can raise the risk of clots. People with cancers of the pancreas, ovary, lining of the womb, and acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), have a slightly raised risk.

- Sometimes, cancer treatments can increase the risk of blood clots. Some examples of this are certain types of hormonal therapy for cancer, such as tamoxifen for breast cancer and stilboestrol for prostate cancer.²

For more on air pressure and blood circulation, see the June [issue](#) of *HealthHints* in our series on Health Tips for Travelers.

Sources:

1. Stephan, P. (2007) Breast cancer: Airline travel during chemotherapy [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From http://breastcancer.about.com/od/lifeduringtreatment/qt/metal_detec.htm.
2. Cancerbackup (2006). Travel and medical conditions [on-line]. Retrieved April 4, 2008. From <http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk/Resourcessupport/Practicalissues/Travel/Medicalconditions>.

Traveling While Pregnant

“Although pregnancy is a normal state rather than a disabled condition, pregnant women need to consider the potential problems associated with ...travel, as well as the quality of medical care available at the destination and during transit. According to the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the safest time for a pregnant woman to travel is during the second trimester (18-24 weeks)... Women in the third trimester (25-36 weeks) may be asked by their physician to stay within 300 miles of home because of concerns about access to medical care in case of problems such as hypertension, phlebitis, or false or premature labor. The final decision should be based on a consultation with the woman’s health care provider.”¹

Pregnant travelers can use the following checklist from the National Center for Infectious Disease as they prepare to travel. These items are of particular importance for those traveling abroad.

- Make sure your health insurance is valid while abroad and during pregnancy. Check to see if the policy covers a newborn should delivery take place. Obtain a supplemental travel insurance policy and a prepaid medical evacuation insurance policy.
- Check medical facilities at the destination. For women in the last trimester, medical facilities should be able to manage complications of pregnancy, toxemia, and cesarean sections.
- Determine beforehand whether prenatal care will be required abroad and, if so, who will provide it. Make sure prenatal visits requiring specific timing are not missed.
- Check ahead of time whether blood is screened for HIV and hepatitis B at the destination. Pregnant travelers and their companions should know their blood types.
- Check facilities at the destination for the availability of safe food and beverages, including bottled water and pasteurized milk.¹



Additionally, consult your doctor about vaccinations. It is best to be vaccinated prior to becoming pregnant. If you need vaccines or prophylactic (preventative) drugs for your travels, discuss the safety of these medicines with your doctor. Most medications should be avoided, if possible, but some vaccines are still safe during pregnancy.¹

During pregnancy, comfort is also of particular concern. Reserve an aisle seat on airplanes when possible. This seat allows you to get up and move around and access the bathroom more easily. Remember that airplane, as well as bus and train, aisles may be narrow and bathroom facilities small. These aspects may be considerations for you when deciding on your mode of travel and level of comfort.

Note: Air travel is safe for most pregnant women up to 36 weeks gestation, but travel is not recommended at any time during pregnancy for women who have either medical or obstetric complications — such as pregnancy-induced hypertension, poorly controlled diabetes, or sickle cell disease — that could result in an unforeseen emergency.²

For car travel, try not to travel more than 5–6 hours a day. Continue following car safety advice. Wear your seatbelt (including the lap and shoulder belt) even if there is an airbag. Keep your seat as far back from the dashboard as you can (at least 10 inches, if possible).

If traveling by sea, you may have an upset stomach. Check on cruise rules for pregnant women, and make sure the ship has a doctor or nurse on board. Ask your doctor about safe options for calming seasickness.³

Sources:

1. National Center for Infectious Disease (2000). Pregnancy, breast-feeding, and travel [on-line]. Retrieved February 20, 2008. From http://medem.com/search/article_display.cfm?path=\\TANQUERAY\M_ContentItem&mstr=/M_ContentItem/ZZZ52JRE5BC.html&soc=CDC&srch_typ=NAV_SERCH.
2. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (2008). Air travel during pregnancy safe for most women [on-line]. Retrieved April 15, 2008. From http://medem.com/search/article_display.cfm?path=\\TANQUERAY\M_ContentItem&mstr=/M_ContentItem/ZZZKWOAGVC.html&soc=ACOG&srch_typ=NAV_SERCH.
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Traveling with Pacemakers, Implantable Defibrillators, Implanted Metal Devices, & Coronary Stents

“People with pacemakers, implantable defibrillators, or coronary stents should carry a card or doctor’s letter documenting the presence, kind, location, and electronic characteristics of the implanted device. An implanted metal device may trigger an alarm as the person passes through electronic security. Electronic security devices do not generally affect implantable defibrillators, but travelers are advised to avoid standing in walk-through metal detectors for more than 15 seconds. Hand-held metal detectors are also safe for people with defibrillators, but prolonged contact, such as holding the detector over the defibrillator for more than 5 seconds, should be avoided.”¹

If you have concerns about your medical device while traveling or entering security checkpoints, talk with your doctor. He/she can provide the information you need to be prepared. It is okay to ask for special measures at security checkpoints, but be prepared that this may mean a pat down search of the body. As long as you make security personnel aware of your condition ahead of time, however, this can all be handled in a smooth and appropriate fashion so that all can arrive at their destination safely and with the least risk for negative health consequences.

Here are some tips from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA)² that may help:

- If you have an implanted medical device that you would like to remain private and confidential, ask the security officer to please be discreet when assisting you through the screening process.
- It is recommended (but not required) that individuals with a pacemaker carry a pacemaker identification card (ID) when going through airport security. Show the security officer your pacemaker ID, if you have one, and ask the security officer to conduct a pat-down inspection rather than having you walk through the metal detector or be handwanded.

- It is recommended (but not required) that you advise the security officer that you have an implanted pacemaker, other implanted medical device, or metal implant and where that implant is located.
- The security officer will offer you a private screening once it becomes known that you have a metal implant or implanted medical device.
- If your doctor has indicated that you should not go through the metal detector or be handwanded because it could affect the functionality of your device or the magnetic calibration of your device, or if you are concerned, ask the security officer for a pat-down inspection instead.
- Security officers will need to resolve all alarms associated with metal implants. Most alarms will be able to be resolved during a pat-down; therefore, clothing will not be required to be removed or lifted as part of the inspection process.²

Whatever the process required, be prepared by knowing what to expect, requesting pat-down options when necessary, and having recommended identification of your medical device(s) available. Try to remain calm and unagitated. The security personnel are there for your protection and the protection of all travelers.

Sources:

1. 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>.
2. Transportation Security Administration (2008). Hidden disabilities [on-line]. Retrieved February 26, 2008. From http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1374.shtm.