

Tips for Travelling with Diabetes

Diabetes should not stop you from travelling. A successful trip while managing diabetes will just require some planning. Your diabetes does not take a vacation even if you do!

Tips to prepare for your travel plans:

- Wear identification for your diabetes (e.g. MedicAlert bracelet)
- Learn to say “sugar” or “I need some sugar” in the languages of countries you are visiting
- Book a visit with your diabetes team at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to help with planning
- Get a travel letter from your doctor and review any travel immunizations needed
- Take twice the amount of diabetes supplies you will need in case of delays or changes in plans
- Let the people you are travelling with know you have diabetes
- Check your blood sugar more often as changes in your routine may affect your blood sugars
- Get health insurance for travel out of country
- Check with your travel agent/airline to confirm necessary items are permitted in your carry-on

If you are travelling by flight:

- If travelling across many time zones, wear a watch and do not change the time until you have reached your destination
- Place your diabetes supplies in your carry on luggage and not in your checked luggage
- Be alert for signs and symptoms of low blood sugars
- Try not to sleep through any meals. Use alarms if needed.
- Check blood sugars every 4 hours on long flights and correct blood sugars as needed.

If you are travelling by road:

- Be aware of driving guidelines (blood sugars need to be ≥ 5.0 mmol/L)
- Stop often to take breaks, eat regularly, test your blood sugar at least every 4 hours
- Do not put your insulin in the glove box or trunk to prevent freezing or overheating
- Always keep fast acting sugar with you and treat if you feel symptoms of hypoglycemia
- If travelling with someone, take turns driving. Try not to drive ≥ 12 hours/day.

If you are travelling by foot:

- Avoid travelling alone especially if you are at high risk of hypoglycemia
- Tell someone of your travel plans
- Adjust insulin accordingly if there is physical activity involved
- Check your feet daily for signs of insect bites or wounds

Are you taking insulin?

- Pack your supplies, meter, strips, insulin and syringes or pens in the luggage you keep with you
- If travelling with someone, split your diabetes supplies with your companion.
- Carry fast-acting sugar such as glucose tabs with you, as well as a snack.
- Do not place your diabetes supplies in checked luggage as they can be exposed to heat or cold.

Changes in your Insulin Doses

- **When travelling east you lose hours** and the day becomes shorter, you may require less long-acting insulin. If travelling east from Canada to Europe you will lose 5-7 hours, you may need to reduce the bedtime dose insulin by 1/3 on the travel day (5-7 hours is 1/3 less of the day).
- **When travelling west you gain hours** and the day becomes longer. You may need more insulin and extra meals on the travel day. If you are travelling west from Europe to Canada you will gain 5-7 hours and will likely eat an extra meal and will require an extra dose of rapid or short acting insulin.
- In general, take your long-acting insulin every 24 hours, if you go longer without taking it then manage your blood sugar with your rapid or short acting insulin. Do not take your long acting insulin within the last 24 hours of your last dose.
- **Plan out your time zone changes and insulin dose changes with your diabetes educator.**

Insulin / Medication Dose Change Recommendations:

Checklist of supplies to pack:

- Insulin / diabetes medications (twice the amount needed) (make sure they are labeled clearly)
- Blood glucose meter, back up blood glucose meter
- Test strips, ketone strips, lancets, and batteries
- Snacks (e.g. trail mix, granola bars, protein bars)
- Pen needles and insulin pens, if using insulin
- Fast acting sugar to treat low blood sugars
- Proof of prescription for diabetes supplies and medications
- Glucagon kit (if you are at risk for severe low blood sugars)
- Alcohol wipes
- Diabetes identification (e.g. MedicAlert)
- Cooling and insulation packs (e.g. Frio products)
- Safe sharps disposal
- Additional items:
 - Comfortable walking shoes, especially if travelling by foot
 - Clean cotton socks
 - Drinkable water
 - Sunblock and insect repellent
 - Medication for nausea, diarrhea or any other common travel illnesses
 - First aid kit for minor wounds