

# travel & diabetes

**Travel can and should be fun and having diabetes doesn't mean your travelling days are over. With good planning, there's no reason why your travels won't be safe, fun and hassle-free whether within Australia or overseas.**

## What planning tips do you have?

- If travelling by air, it is important to comply with the latest Australian airline security regulations. Check 'Complying with Australian airline security regulations' on page 4 for details.
- Try to estimate what medication, test strips, insulin and syringes you will need for the entire trip and pack more than your needs in case of loss or damage. If possible, pack a spare meter. Remember that glucose meters purchased in other countries may not register in mmol/L, so if you did need to buy a new meter displaying readings in mg/dL it would need to be converted to read mmol/L.
- If you are using an insulin pump, remember to take extra pump batteries, consumables, your manual and a list of your pump settings. It is wise to contact your pump manufacturer before you go, to find out what resources are available at your travel destination.
- Take clearly written details of your next of kin or family member plus a letter from your doctor outlining your medical conditions, the medications you take and the devices you use (see 'Complying with Australian airline security regulations' on page 4).
- Take your Medicare card (see 'Making the most of travel insurance' on page 3) and your National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) card.
- If you are taking insulin or diabetes tablets, carry some form of quick acting carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets or jelly beans in case of a hypo plus some biscuits, crackers or dried fruit in case of delayed or unsuitable meals\*. Refer to the *Hypoglycaemia and Diabetes* information sheet.

\* In some international airports, biscuits and dried fruit cannot be taken through customs so you may need to leave what you don't use on the aircraft and if necessary buy more at the airport once through customs.

**Be sure to comply with Australian airline security regulations specifically for people with diabetes as well as regulations which limit the amount of liquids (including aerosols and gels) carried by international travellers in their carry-on baggage.**



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- Insulin and blood glucose test strips are stable at room temperature under 30 degrees. They will be damaged by temperature extremes so must not be frozen or left in the sun or heat for any length of time. If you are likely to be in very hot or cold places, take a small insulated bag which you can buy from your State or Territory Diabetes Organisation (phone 1300 136 588).
- Take a small approved sharps container (available from your State or Territory Diabetes Organisation or your pharmacy) for your used lancets and syringes. You can then dispose of it when you come across a sharps disposal service, offered by many hotels and most airports.
- Accuracy of blood glucose results is also affected by temperature at the time of operation. As temperature ranges vary for conducting a test, consult your meter user manual for your meter's operational temperature range.
- Wear some form of medical identification that says you have diabetes.
- When travelling long distances, try to take regular meal breaks and do some type of physical activity.
- The excitement of the trip may affect your blood glucose levels so check your levels more often. If you're using insulin, always have a hypo pack with you and know how to adjust your dose. Discuss with your doctor or diabetes educator.
- Carry a small first aid kit with you in case of aches and pains, minor cuts and burns.
- Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes.

**Contact your State or Territory Organisation for a *Travel Checklist for People with Type 1 Diabetes* to help you plan for a safe and hassle-free trip.**

## Any other tips for overseas travel?

If you're planning a trip overseas, you will need to think about allowing for different foods (speak to a dietitian about the types of food/cuisines you may find at your destination), how to cope with changes in time zones, possibly vaccinations and extreme climates. You will also need to be well prepared for mishaps such as long delays and misplaced baggage.

### Before you go

There are many things to consider before you leave, such as airline regulations, a well-timed itinerary, in-flight needs and being prepared for that 'what-if' situation. Good planning is the key.

## **Making your bookings**

- When booking your flights, you may choose to tell the airline you have diabetes. This will be passed on to the cabin crew who will then be better able to meet your needs.
- Many airlines offer meals suitable for people with diabetes. Remember, there needs to be adequate carbohydrates in the meal you order so it's a good idea to check what's available. Carry additional food (particularly carbohydrate foods) with you to ensure you have enough to eat during your flight and to cover any delays you might experience.

## **Staying well during your travels**

- Talk to your doctor about your travel plans, if possible at least two months before leaving. It is important to discuss your medication/insulin adjustments, Glucagon and testing for ketones during the trip. This is also a good time to arrange the papers you will need to comply with airline security regulations (DOTARS – Department of Transport and Regional Services [www.dotars.gov.au](http://www.dotars.gov.au)).
- Talk to your dietitian about the types of food and cuisines you are likely to find at your destination.
- If your planned trip has different time zones, your doctor or diabetes educator will advise you on when to take your medications and/or your insulin.
- During long hauls, support hose can help to prevent swelling and may reduce the risk of clotting in the veins of the legs. Check first with your diabetes health care team if this is suitable for you.
- Important information about any vaccinations required can be obtained from your doctor or specialised travel medical centre. They will also advise you of other tablets you may need to take with you just in case, to treat diarrhoea or nausea. Helpful websites include:
  - [www.dotars.gov.au](http://www.dotars.gov.au)
  - [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
  - [www.travelclinic.com.au](http://www.travelclinic.com.au)
  - [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au)
  - [www.tmvc.com.au](http://www.tmvc.com.au)
  - [www.travelhealth.com.au](http://www.travelhealth.com.au).

### **Making the most of travel insurance**

You should have travel insurance, both for your health and your belongings. Make sure your accident and health cover applies both to pre-existing conditions and the places you will visit. For information call your State or Territory Diabetes Organisation on 1300 136 588.

The Australian Government has arrangements with a range of countries providing travellers with benefits similar to Medicare if needed, but only for acute or emergency care. In this event, you would need to produce your Medicare card. For more information, call Medicare Australia on 6124 6333 or visit their website [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au).

### **Complying with Australian airline security regulations**

Make arrangements in advance to be sure you comply with Australian airline security regulations specifically for people with diabetes. If travelling with a non-Australian carrier, check well in advance with your chosen airline for specific security guidelines.

#### **Australian airline security regulations are:**

- Diabetes supplies including testing equipment, insulin, Glucagon, syringes, pen needles and insulin pump consumables carried on board must be in the hand baggage of the person who has diabetes and whose name appears on the airline ticket. Remember that items in checked-in baggage may be exposed to extreme temperature variations and may become unusable.
- All prescription medications, including your insulin and/or Glucagon, are to be carried in the packaging dispensed by the pharmacist with the label displaying your name clearly visible.
- Carry several copies of a letter from your doctor (check before you leave that it is readable) which you will need to get through customs. The letter should outline your medical conditions, the medications you take and the devices you use for your insulin and blood glucose testing such as insulin pens, syringes and needles or pump unit. It should also stress the importance of carrying your medications with you. For those using an insulin pump, the letter must stress the need for the pump to be worn at all times.
- Australian airline regulations limit the amount of liquids (including aerosols and gels) carried by international travellers in their carry-on baggage. Each container must not exceed 100ml and must fit into a transparent re-sealable plastic bag no larger than one litre (approx 20cm x 20cm) which can be purchased from the supermarket or at the airport. While people with diabetes who need to carry supplies of insulin are exempt, they will be required to present their insulin at the security checkpoint and carry proof of their condition and their need for insulin (ie: letter from your doctor as above).

### **Rights of people with diabetes during security check**

People with diabetes are entitled to request access to a private consultation room if discussion about their condition is required at the security checkpoint. If they feel it necessary, they also have the right to ask to speak with the airport manager on duty.

People with diabetes using an insulin pump should not remove their pump at the security checkpoint. This should not be requested by security staff but if there are concerns, the person with diabetes has the right to request privacy which staff are obligated to provide.

Insulin pumps do not affect the aircraft's electronic systems and must not be switched off during the flight. People wearing continuous electronic devices to monitor blood glucose levels may need to switch them off during take-off and landing. Check with the airline.

***Before travelling always check [www.dotars.gov.au](http://www.dotars.gov.au) for the latest regulations.***

### **At the airport**

- Arrive early to avoid rushing.
- It is considered unlikely that insulin would be harmed by exposure to x-rays in security equipment. However, if you are concerned, you may ask airport security staff to physically check you and your baggage rather than you and your baggage going through the x-ray equipment. Security staff members are obliged to respond to such a request under regulations administered by the responsible Federal agency, the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS).

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## During the flight

- You may decide to tell the flight attendant at the start of the trip that you have diabetes so your needs are well catered for. However, this is personal choice.
- Keep your diabetes supplies where you can reach them immediately even if the seat belt sign is on, perhaps in the seat pocket in front of you, not under the seat or in the overhead locker.
- Always wait until your meal is in front of you before giving insulin or oral medications that may cause hypoglycaemia. For added safety, you can take your insulin halfway through or immediately after your meal in case there is a major unforeseen interruption.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Drink enough water to avoid thirst and becoming dehydrated.
- Sleep whenever possible and ask the cabin crew to wake you for meals.
- Wear comfortable shoes and exercise your feet to help prevent swelling.
- Move around the cabin as often as you can. Walking up and down the aisle will assist circulation and help to keep your blood glucose levels under control.

## What if something goes wrong while I'm away?

With all that planning, this is most unlikely. However, don't panic – seek medical assistance when required, if possible with advice from your travel insurer. Most costs can be recovered through health benefits or your own medical insurance when you get home. Enjoy and bon voyage!

### Would you like to join Australia's leading diabetes organisation?

- > Dietary services
- > Free magazines
- > Children's services
- > Educational literature
- > Product discounts
- > Support groups

For more information phone **1300 136 588** or visit your State/Territory Organisation's website:

<b>ACT</b>	<a href="http://www.diabetes-act.com.au">www.diabetes-act.com.au</a>	<b>NSW</b>	<a href="http://www.diabetesnsw.com.au">www.diabetesnsw.com.au</a>
<b>NT</b>	<a href="http://www.healthylivingnt.org.au">www.healthylivingnt.org.au</a>	<b>QLD</b>	<a href="http://www.diabetesqld.org.au">www.diabetesqld.org.au</a>
<b>SA</b>	<a href="http://www.diabetessa.com.au">www.diabetessa.com.au</a>	<b>TAS</b>	<a href="http://www.diabetestas.com.au">www.diabetestas.com.au</a>
<b>VIC</b>	<a href="http://www.diabetesvic.org.au">www.diabetesvic.org.au</a>	<b>WA</b>	<a href="http://www.diabeteswa.com.au">www.diabeteswa.com.au</a>

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**Health professionals:** For bulk copies of this resource, contact Diabetes Australia in your State/Territory.

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