

# Flying With Diabetes

Having diabetes shouldn't stop you from traveling. But taking a few precautions can help you have a safer and more relaxed trip, especially if you take insulin.

## Plan Ahead

See your diabetes care provider 4–6 weeks before taking a long trip so you will have enough time to work on your diabetes control. Bring a copy of your itinerary, showing arrival and departure times, flight durations, and time zone changes to help determine whether you need to change your insulin or pill regimen when crossing time zones. Get any immunizations you need at least a month early. Ask for extra prescriptions in case you lose your medicines while traveling.

## Pack Wisely

Keep diabetes supplies in a carry-on bag. This will keep you from losing them if checked luggage is lost and will protect them from extreme temperatures that could reduce their effectiveness. Pack insulin vials between layers of clothing or wrapped in something soft.

Airport X-ray machines won't hurt your glucose meter, insulin, or insulin pump. If you have concerns, ask to have your carry-on bags hand-inspected.

## Know the Rules

You can bring syringes and insulin delivery systems on a plane only if a vial of insulin is presented with a professional, preprinted pharmaceutical label that clearly identifies the medication. Bring the original insulin box, which usually displays the label. Lancets must be capped and brought aboard with a glucose meter that has the manufacturer's name printed on it. Keep glucagon kits in their original containers

that show a preprinted pharmaceutical label.

## Take More, Not Less

Take two blood glucose monitors (packed in separate bags) and more than enough supplies—perhaps an extra 2 weeks' worth. This includes insulin, test strips and lancets, glucose meter batteries, and insulin pump supplies if you use one. Consider carrying rapid-acting insulin, even if you don't usually use it, to treat high blood glucose or manage any sick days.

Take a glucagon kit, other prescription medicines you need, and medicines for vomiting and diarrhea. Teach travel companions how to administer glucagon in case you have severe hypoglycemia. Wear a Medic Alert bracelet or necklace that shows you have diabetes and use insulin.

## Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy

Carry glucose tablets, gels, or candy to relieve symptoms of hypoglycemia and snacks such as breakfast bars, crackers, or trail mix for missed or delayed meals. Call your airline at least 2 days in advance to request meals that are low in sugar, fat, and cholesterol. Keep yourself well hydrated while flying by drinking nonalcoholic, caffeine-free beverages. Check your blood glucose at least every 4–6 hours. Don't take pre-meal insulin until your meal is placed in front of you.

## Know What To Expect Abroad

In the United States, "U-100" insulin and syringes are used. But other countries may have "U-40" or "U-80" insulin and syringes. If you need to buy insulin abroad, remember that you'll need U-40 syringes for U-40 insulin or U-80 syringes for U-80 insulin. Syringes that

don't match the type of insulin you use will draw up the wrong amount.

## Inject Insulin Safely

Airplane cabins are pressurized. Before using a syringe in flight, remove and replace the plunger to allow pressure equalization.

If you are traveling across several time zones, you may need to change the timing and amount of your insulin doses. When you travel eastward, days become shorter, so you may need less insulin than usual. Traveling westward, days become longer, so you may need more insulin than usual. Your diabetes care provider can recommend adjustments to your regimen.

While flying, keep your wristwatch set to the time where you embarked. This will help you remember when to take your insulin. Change your watch to local time the morning after you arrive at your destination.

## Protect Your Medicines

In tropical locations, refrigerate your insulin as soon as possible. If refrigeration is not available, a wide-mouthed insulated non-breakable bottle or thermos can keep your insulin at a safe temperature. Fill the container with cold water or ice to cool it, then pour out the water or ice, put the insulin vials inside, and place the cap on securely. Never freeze insulin. Keep pills dry to avoid moisture damage.

