

# Diabetes and travel

Patient Information Leaflet



Planning your journey or holiday before you go helps you to enjoy yourself and may avoid problems with your diabetes while you are away.

## BEFORE YOU GO:

- ❖ See your family doctor if you have any concerns about your current health and ability to travel.
- ❖ Have any recommended vaccinations. Ask your travel agent for advice.
- ❖ Vaccinations are best given well in advance of travel, as they may upset your diabetes for a short time. Ask your diabetes team for advice.
- ❖ Make sure you have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) if you are travelling to a European Union member country. It will ensure that you have easy access to healthcare in that country. You can obtain your EHIC from [www.ehic.org.uk](http://www.ehic.org.uk), by calling 0300 330 1350, or fill in a pack at the Post Office.
- ❖ It is still advisable to buy travel insurance as the EHIC does not cover emergency repatriation and not all countries give the level of cover of the NHS. Treatment within the EHIC scheme may not be adequate to cover your diabetes. The EHIC scheme does not cover countries outside the EU.
- ❖ Inform your travel company and travel insurer that you have diabetes. Ask if they recover loss or replacement of insulin.
- ❖ Obtain some form of diabetes identity card or jewellery stating that you have diabetes. Diabetes UK will supply leaflets written in the language of the country that you are travelling to.

- ❖ If you are carrying syringes, needles or other equipment, you are advised to carry a letter, particularly if you are travelling by air. You can obtain a travel letter from your diabetes team.

## HOLIDAY CHECKLIST

Take twice as much insulin or tablets and equipment with you as you think you will need. Take ample dextrosol tablets, glucogel, or glucogen and Ketostix with you. Carry all of your tablets or insulin and diabetes equipment in your hand luggage with you. If you are travelling with someone, give some of this to your travelling companion in case yours becomes lost.

If you are travelling by air, never put your insulin into your suitcase. Temperatures in the hold of an aircraft are very low and will cause insulin to freeze. On some airlines, once on board the plane cabin crew may request that medication be handed over for storage during the flight. For this reason it may be advisable to put insulin and syringes/needles in a separate carrier bag. Keep Hypo treatments to hand.

Carry a clearly written list of all your current medicine or take a repeat prescription sheet. In case you need more medication whilst you are away.

Make up a simple first-aid box, which should include:

- ❖ Suntan lotion
- ❖ Simple pain killers
- ❖ Anti-diarrhoea capsules
- ❖ Travel sickness pills
- ❖ Plasters
- ❖ Antiseptic solution

## IF YOU ARE TREATED WITH INSULIN

- ❖ Find out what types and strengths of insulin are available in the country that you are travelling to in case of emergency. In the UK, we use U100 insulin but this is not available everywhere. You can obtain more information from Diabetes UK: 0345 123 2399 or at [http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Living\\_with\\_diabetes/Travel/](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Living_with_diabetes/Travel/).
- ❖ Do not expose your insulin to very high or very low temperatures. It should be kept out of direct sunlight and must be kept cool.
- ❖ Take a cool bag with you or find some cool place to store your insulin when you arrive. If you don't have a fridge in your room/accommodation, ask staff for cool bags. Do not hand over your insulin.
- ❖ Don't keep your insulin in a glove compartment or boot of a car.
- ❖ Remember that insulin may be absorbed faster in warmer climates, and you may therefore be more likely to have a hypo. Regular blood tests are therefore important as you may need to reduce your dose of insulin.

## LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS AND CHANGING TIME-ZONES

- ❖ Prepare for a long journey well in advance by asking your Diabetes Specialist Nurse to help work out your insulin dose.
- ❖ Try to be flexible and be prepared for flight delays.
- ❖ If you are travelling with someone keep your watch at British time. This will help you to work out how far you are from your usual eating time.

## EATING AND DRINKING

- ❖ Carry a sandwich, biscuits or cereal bars to cover any unexpected delays in travel. Remember to take this in your hand luggage and not to put this in the hold of a plane.
- ❖ Take any sweeteners with you.
- ❖ Airline meals may not contain sufficient carbohydrate. It is better to ask for an "ordinary" meal rather than asking for a special "diabetic" meal, or to carry extra bread, a roll or fruit with you.
- ❖ Do not drink alcohol on an empty stomach. Remember that sugar-free drinks may not be available in all countries. In hot climates drink plenty of sugar-free fluids to prevent dehydration. Carry your Hypo treatment and Blood glucose monitoring equipment with you.
- ❖ Always check that the water is safe to drink.

## HOLIDAY FOOT CARE

- ❖ Take comfortable, well-fitting shoes in case your feet swell in hot weather.
- ❖ On the beach, do not walk barefoot, especially on hot sand.
- ❖ Watch out for sharp objects on the beach or while you are swimming.
- ❖ Check your feet every morning and evening, looking for breaks in the skin.
- ❖ If you develop a blister, cover this with a plaster and keep it clean.

## IF YOU ARE ILL ON HOLIDAY

- ❖ Never stop your insulin or tablets, even if you cannot take solid foods.
- ❖ Before you travel, discuss managing sickness and diarrhoea with your diabetes care team. As a precaution, only drink bottled water, avoid salads and be careful about the hygiene level of restaurants.
- ❖ If you have sickness and/or diarrhoea and this persists, you should seek urgent medical advice.

## FURTHER ADVICE

Diabetes UK Careline – **0345 123 2399** or at [http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Living\\_with\\_diabetes/Travel/](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Living_with_diabetes/Travel/)

Foreign & Commonwealth Offices – **[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)**

Or contact your Diabetes Specialist Nurse for further information.

For further information go to:  
**[Diabetes MCN website](http://www.diabetes.mcn.org.uk)**



[www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk)

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE USE OF PATIENT INFORMATION

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**NHS Lanarkshire** - for local services and the latest health news visit [www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)  
NHS Lanarkshire General Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

**NHS inform** - The national health information service for Scotland.  
[www.nhsinform.org](http://www.nhsinform.org)  
Tel No: 0800 22 44 88

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