

Travel Tips

For people with diabetes

This handout gives tips to help people with diabetes stay safe and healthy while they are away from home.

Plan Ahead

Here are some tips to make your trip as enjoyable and stress-free as possible. Please ask us for help in planning your “diabetes schedule” around your travel schedule.

- Be sure your blood glucose is in your target range before traveling. Set control goals for yourself during your trip, but do not expect “perfect” blood glucose control while traveling.
- If you will travel cross time zones, please ask us for help with your medicine and meal schedule. The details will depend on:
 - Your insulin delivery plan (shots or insulin pump),
 - The length of your flight, and
 - Whether you are traveling east or west.



Planning ahead for your diabetes travel needs will help you have a more successful and relaxing trip.

We can give you clear advice on how to best manage your diabetes when changing time zones. Even so, it can be challenging to keep your glucose in your target range.

- Take written copies of your prescriptions for all medicines and supplies, in case you are asked about them. It is also a good idea to have a letter from your healthcare provider that says you have diabetes and need to carry syringes or other supplies to take your insulin.
- Bring extra diabetes supplies – more than enough for the length of your trip. You may not be able to find supplies in some places.
- **Carry all your supplies in your carry-on bag**, not in a bag you check. Insulin packed in your checked bag may get too hot or too cold. If this happens, it may not work properly. And, checked bags can get lost!



If you will be traveling by plane, keep in mind that most airlines no longer serve free meals. Be sure to put snacks in your carry-on luggage.

- If you use a continuous glucose sensor system, pack the extra sensors in your carry-on bag. Cold temperatures in the luggage compartment can ruin them.
- If you use a diabetes medicine that causes low blood glucose (such as insulin, glyburide, glipizide or glimepiride), keep quick-acting sugar where you can reach it easily. For example, keep glucose tablets in your pocket or carry-on bag under your seat. If it is in the overhead bin on an airplane or in the trunk of your car, you may not be able to get to it when you need it.
- Review your medical insurance plan. Make sure you have coverage for emergency healthcare while traveling.
- If you will be traveling by plane, keep in mind most airlines no longer serve free meals. Some have boxed meals you can buy on the plane. If a meal will be available, you may be able to request a diabetic meal, but you must do this before your trip. Call your airline several days before your trip and ask what food will be available on your flight. **Be sure to carry snacks in your carry-on bag.**
- Carry a diabetes identification wallet card and wear a diabetes identification necklace or bracelet at all times.
- Check your blood glucose more often while traveling, and keep a written diary of blood tests. Measure urine ketones if your blood sugar is over 250 mg/dl or if you feel ill.

If You Use an Insulin Pump or Continuous Glucose Sensor

Equipment used by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) may affect how your devices work. Check your device manufacturer's websites for up-to-date information to prevent damage to your diabetes devices. You can also check the TSA website (www.tsa.gov).

To keep your diabetes devices safe:

- Do **not** put your diabetes devices through the conveyor belt for X-ray scanning.
- Do **not** walk through the airport full body scanner when you are wearing your insulin pump, glucose sensor, or transmitter.
- Ask the Transportation Safety Officer (TSO) for a "pat down" instead of placing any of your personal items on the conveyor belt.
- If you need extra help, you may ask to talk with the TSO supervisor.

Travel Checklist

To help you pack for your trip, here is a checklist of supplies to take:

- Ask your diabetes care provider for a travel letter.
- Blood glucose meter, test strips, lancets, and an extra meter battery.
- Diabetes pills, insulin in vials or pens, or other injectable diabetes medicines.
- Insulated travel pack or kit such as a Frio Insulin Cooling Case for proper temperature storage of your insulin vials, insulin pens or other injectable diabetes medicine. Beware of storing insulin directly in ice or on a gel cold pack. Very cold temperatures can damage insulin.
- Syringes, pen needles, other injection devices, and alcohol swabs.
- Other diabetes supplies as needed: insulin infusion pump, syringe reservoirs, infusion sets, tape, and extra batteries.

Important: Even if you always use a pump, take some insulin syringes and long-acting insulin such as Lantus (glargine) or NPH with you, in case the pump fails.

- Other prescription medicines.
- Emergency supplies such as quick-acting sugar, like glucose tablets, and ketone test strips. If you use insulin, also bring a glucagon emergency kit. Check the expiration dates on all of your supplies before your trip.
- Anti-motion, anti-nausea, anti-diarrhea medicines, such as Compazine.
- Diabetes identification.
- Diabetes record book for test results.
- Food and a water bottle.

Note: You cannot bring any drinks, including water, through security, so plan to buy water after you are in the secure area of the airport. You can also pack an empty water bottle in your carry-on or checked bag. Fill it once you are past security or when you reach your destination.

Other Resources

University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) Travel Medicine Clinics

If you are going to another country, you can get pre-travel immunizations and advice from a UWMC Travel Medicine Clinic. Make your appointment 6 to 8 weeks before you leave on your trip. The Travel Medicine Clinic can also provide care after your trip, if you need it.

Travel Medicine Clinics at UW Neighborhood Clinics

- Ballard.....206-789-7777
- Belltown206.443.0400
- Factoria 425.957.9000
- Issaquah425.391.3900
- Northgate206.528.8000
- Ravenna.....206.525.7777
- Shoreline206.542.5656
- Hall Health Center on UW Seattle Campus..... 206.616.2495

Health Department

The Seattle/King County Health Department also offers immunizations and other travel-related healthcare services. You will need to call and make an appointment.

The downtown Seattle clinic is the only King County Health Department location that offers these services. It is located at 2124 Fourth Avenue, and the phone number is 206.296.4960.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Endocrine and Diabetes Care Center: 206.598.4882

UW Medicine Neighborhood Clinics: 206.520.5000