How to Prepare for a Holiday With Diabetes

by AFRA WILLMORE

Holiday With Diabetes: What You Need to Know

I am lucky enough to be going abroad on holiday this year and as is my habit, one of the first things I did once the booking was confirmed was to go online and look up the cuisine of the country I am going to.

I followed that up by checking out reviews and pictures of the food at the hotel we are staying in – yes I know it's a bit tragic, but bear in mind I am one of those annoying people who occasionally publishes pictures of my own meals on social media. Sorry about that.

After a short browse (OK, a long, lingering, drooling look) at images of the seemingly never-ending buffet, focussing heavily on the vast array of creamy sugary deserts, I remembered my type 2 diabetes.

I'd like to say that in light of this I vowed not to touch a single pudding, and to stay away from the small mountain of French bread, but you and I both know that was never going to happen.

So instead I made a plan that will hopefully allow me to enjoy tasty treats from the unlimited food supply while keeping my blood glucose low and stable.

Here are my top tips for coping with holiday food.

Do Your Research

Check out what the local specialties are, what the ingredients are likely to be, and if the language will be foreign to you buy a good translation book or download a translation app on your smartphone so you can check ingredients on the menu. Then choose the most diabetic-friendly option, or if it's possible, ask for a diabetic-friendly version of the dish.

For instance, if you were going to Greece, or one of the Greek islands, you could choose a healthy and tasty Greek salad with heart-healthy olives and feta drizzled with a mall amount of the local olive oil rather than the creamy moussaka on the menu.

Choose grilled or barbecued meats in the Mediterranean and mint, cucumber and yoghurt based Tzatziki with a small amount of warm pitta bread as a treat. In Asian countries avoid creamy or deep fried food in favour of noodles and stir-fries or tomato-based or tandoor-oven cooked dishes.

Wherever you are in the world avoid fried, creamy, carb-heavy meals, apart from as maybe a one-off holiday treat.

For dessert make the most of local fruit, try some new-to-you varieties and fruit or yoghurt-based puddings or share a piece of cake with a loved one – romantic and half the calories and carbs.

Whether it’s an all-you-can-eat breakfast, long lunch or a luxurious dinner it’s important to keep an eye on your portion sizes. Keep thinking low GI, watch the amount of carbs you eat and don’t be tempted to pile your plate high – especially at all-inclusive destinations where you eat more just because it’s “free.”

Avoid Alcohol

Obviously many people like to enjoy a drink or two on holiday, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But remember you need to be careful combining alcohol and diabetes; any form of alcohol counts towards your intake of sugar, and it’s easy to send sugars spiraling high, especially if you can’t get low-cal mixers at the bar.

Team overindulgence of the local wines or spirits with overeating and you are heading for a blood sugar meltdown.

Add to that the inhibition-relaxing effect of alcohol and you might find that after a couple of pre-dinner tipples you throw caution to the wind when choosing your meal.

Add Exercise

Being on holiday is often about rest and relaxation, but even on a beach break there are opportunities for exercise, and some might not even feel like exercise.

For example, I hate swimming in my home country. It’s often cold, the changing rooms are quite grim and going outside afterwards with wet hair and damp jeans is nobody’s idea of fun.

Diving into a cool pool from a warm lounger with the prospect of being dried by the sun (through a good sunscreen obviously!) whilst reading a good book and enjoying a cold drink after a few lengths is much more appealing.

Walking, too, is much more interesting if it’s somewhere new and picturesque. Take a camera and you’ll hardly notice the miles you are clocking up, which will help minimise the damage done by holiday overeating.

If your hotel has tennis courts or a gym or exercise classes make the most of them. You could organize a game of beach or water volleyball – you might make some new friends too!

Consider Outside Factors

Another thing you should take into account is how a change in weather or circumstances might affect your condition. Some diabetic patients find heat or cold can send their usually stable blood glucose figures haywire.

If you normally test your blood glucose, make sure you take enough strips and maybe test more frequently. If you don’t usually test, consider asking your doctor if they think temporary testing might be right for you.

If testing is not for you, make sure you listen to your body and that your fellow holidaymakers – friends or family – are aware of what to do and what information to give medics if you become unwell.

Check any storage instructions for your medications, and your airline’s policy on carrying them in hand luggage if you are flying. Many meds have to be kept cool but not too cold.

And don’t forget to arrange travel insurance that definitely covers you for diabetic-related incidents. It’s tempting to book cover online and click “no” in the “any pre-existing conditions” box in a bid to save time, effort and money but it’s definitely worth disclosing. You might not even have to pay any extra money, and you will be able to relax knowing you are fully covered.