Preparing a Diabetes Kit for Emergency Situations

by AFRA WILLMORE

How to Make a Diabetes Kit

Living in a modern world it's easy to become complacent and imagine that life will trundle along a relatively smooth road with no unexpected emergencies.

But that's the nature of the unexpected – no one expects it!

Even with the benefit of scientific weather forecasts and information from other prediction experts, sometimes nature blows a big raspberry at us and shows us her teeth.

It's Important to Prepare

Only this week we had snow in my hometown when none was forecast. Luckily there was not enough to build even a tiny snowman but I remember times when I've woken up to unexpected drifts and the laughter of happy children who realize they have a snow day off school to enjoy.

When you have a condition like diabetes it's important to prepare for the worst even when you cannot imagine it, both at home and while traveling.

Hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunami, landslips, hurricanes, sinkholes, forest fires all may seem unlikely but if they were totally predictable no-one would ever be trapped or worse, die in these freak occurrences.

Take sinkholes for instance. The airport hotel on the outskirts of London I'd booked a couple of years ago turned out to be inaccessible due to a large sinkhole appearing in the dual carriageway! This meant a long delay and lengthy detour delaying dinner and my meds.

Power outages, traffic jams, and strikes are probably much more likely to affect the general population but even though these seem somewhat less catastrophic than an earthquake they could be dangerous for those with type 2 diabetes.

Anything which affects or delays mealtimes and medication can be dangerous so it's wise to plan ahead and create an emergency kit or two so you are never left without food or vital drugs.

I use a small make-up bag for my own day-to-day kit and take a small cool bag – the sort you can fit four soda cans in – for trips.

I carry a large handbag so my kit joins the piles of "must haves" in that but if you aren't a fan of carrying a bag you could keep one kit in the car and one at home. A small rucksack is good to use if you walk or use public transport.

What Should Go into an Emergency Kit for People with Diabetes?

For your diabetes kit, you should put a couple of days supply of diabetic medications. You can buy handy pill boxes with days marked on them which will keep them secure and in the right doses.

Check instructions on your medication to be sure it doesn't need to be kept at a certain temperature. Mostly room temperature is fine but insulin often needs to be kept extra cool. You can buy special cooling pouches or bags to make sure it is kept at the right temperature.

If you test your blood using a finger prick device regularly make sure you have a spare device or at least spare batteries, and test strips.

Now for the fun bit – let's talk snacks.

What Is a Good Snack for Someone with Diabetes?

Cereal bars are useful being individually wrapped and long-lasting. Avoid the ones with lots of chocolate or sugar.

Living with diabetes often involves a lot of label reading and this is especially important when choosing snacks which are marketed as being healthy when they often contain scary amounts of sugar, glucose or similar.

Be careful of maple syrup, corn starch, maltose, molasses, corn syrup, hydrolyzed starch, agave nectar and coconut palm sugar. They are all indicators that sugar in some form has been added to a product.

Crackers and cheese are a good snack, especially if you choose a high fiber cracker. You can buy small portions of cheese wrapped for freshness but you should still keep it in a cool bag when you go out and about.

A small bag of trail mix (without added sugar, glaze or chocolate) or nuts make a good snack to keep sugars steady in case you are late for a meal. Avoid candy bars or dried fruit which can send sugars soaring. A banana is a good choice.

Keep Hydrated

It's important for everyone to keep hydrated but in times of stress or anxiety, it's even more important for people with diabetes to stay hydrated as stress can cause rises in blood glucose.

Water is the best liquid for hydration, although you can add fruit juice or a small amount of sugar-free cordial to add flavor.

A very small (kids lunchbox sized) carton of fruit juice without added sugars is alright if you know your blood sugars, but don't go crazy with fruit juices. Avoid sports hydration drinks as they generally contain glucose or other sugars.

Include an Emergency Snack in Case of Hypoglycemia

Most people with type 2 diabetes are not at risk of hypoglycemia (very low blood glucose) but it's still wise to have something in your kit just in case. Glucose tablets, available from drug stores, or a 150ml can of sugary soda (the tiny size you get as mixers on airplanes) would be ideal.

Add Personal Information

When you were first diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you may have been given a small card to fill in with details of your medication and information on what you (or those around you) should do in case of emergency.

Make sure a card like this is included in your diabetes kit with contact details for your next of kin, doctor's office, and specialist team. Make sure your medication details are always up to date and there is guidance about what to do in case of hypoglycemia.

As an aside, it's always worth keeping information like this on your mobile phone too and consider getting a medical alert bracelet or pendant. You can get them in all styles nowadays from functional rubber festival style wristbands to beautiful gold jewelry.

Get into the habit of checking your kit(s) every week and replace snacks and medication regularly, so they are never out of date.

If you keep one kit on you, one in the glove box of the car, and one easily accessed at home, you will be prepared for any emergency.

Tell Your Loved Ones Where Your Diabetes Kit Is

Lastly, it's wise to make a point of making sure you know what potential emergencies are heading your way. Watch the news, weather forecasts and traffic reports at least once a day.

If you are traveling, check what's going on at your destination and be aware of any potential hazards.

If you have advance notice of a potential emergency in your area like a forest fire, earthquake, volcanic eruption, tornadoes, hurricanes, traffic chaos or heavy snow, even if you are confident it probably won't affect you, maybe think about adding to your diabetes kit just in case so it will see you through if the worst happens.