Three Things to Know When Traveling With Diabetes

by AFRA WILLMORE

Make Traveling With Diabetes Stress-Free

Traveling can be stressful, whether you are heading off on vacation or just need to be somewhere away from home for work.

There's so much to remember, whether your destination is just a few hours away or you are traveling to a whole different time zone: passport, drivers license, tickets, currency, clothes, toiletries and of course any medication you might need.

If you have diabetes you might think meds are the only thing you have to remember. And if you are managing your diabetes without medication you might think you don't have to consider your condition at all when traveling.

Wrong! Diabetes is no barrier to travel, but it's wise to plan ahead to make sure you minimize the risk of any potential problems.

Traveling With Diabetes Checklist: Tips for Preparing

Before you travel you should check you have valid travel insurance. Don't be tempted to not declare health conditions to keep the initial premium down — it really isn't worth it, as you might not be covered for related issues while you are away.

For those managing diabetes with insulin, you have to make a plan on how to carry and dispose of sharps, especially if you are flying.

Check individual airline's websites for detailed information about declaring or carrying your kit, especially if you use a pump or continuous glucose monitor. You may have to tell the airline about your diabetes and insulin at the time of booking.

However you are traveling, take double the medication you need. Your pharmacist should be fine with this if you explain you have travel plans. If you are flying, split your medication into two and carry some in your checked luggage and some in your hand luggage — if either goes missing you are covered.

Taking tablets? Bear in mind the change in time zones if you are traveling long haul. Check with your diabetes healthcare team to see if you need to make adjustments to the times you take your meds.

Remember hot and cold weather can affect your blood glucose levels and how your insulin and blood glucose monitor work. You might consider buying an insulated carrier to protect your kit from extremes of temperature (this includes the hold of the aircraft if you are checking your meds in as part of your luggage).

However you are traveling, it's worth carrying extra diabetic snacks in case of delays or to keep your levels

steady, rather than relying on airline meals or hoping a rest stop appears on the road soon.

Once You Reach Your Destination

When you reach your destination you shouldn't have to worry about food — a diabetic diet is a normal healthy, balanced diet. However, avoid overindulging at the buffet or on alcohol (alcohol and diabetes should be combined with caution), which could send blood glucose sky high.

Try and build some exercise into your day. Whether you are at a business conference or on a tropical holiday, there will always be somewhere to walk.

Precautions for Warm Climates

Take particular care of your feet in the sunshine, especially if you have neuropathy — numbness in your feet can mean you're not aware skin is burning. Protect them from the sun with socks or sunscreen.

Sandals or flip-flops can allow small stones in, so keep checking your feet haven't become cut or blistered. And although walking barefooted is lovely, beware of burning sand and avoid anything that could damage your feet.

Did you know sunbathing could affect your diabetes control, making blood glucose levels higher than normal?

Insulin can also be absorbed more quickly in hot weather — this increases the risk of hypoglycemia. You'll need to monitor your levels more often and be ready to adjust your diet or insulin dose accordingly.

Watch out for misleading test results — extremes of temperature may affect the accuracy of your glucose meter or the heat could have damaged your insulin.

Cold Weather Defenses

Maybe you are planning a skiing trip? Your body uses up more energy staying warm, and this can lead to hypoglycemia, which is more dangerous in cold conditions.

If you suffer from poor circulation or have neuropathy, it's particularly important to prevent frostbite, as numbness in your feet can mean you don't feel the cold.

Make sure you have the right clothing for the climate — hot or cold!

Other Tips for Traveling With Diabetes

In all probability, your trip will pass without drama. But just in case you should do some research before you go to find out if your medication is available in the region you are visiting.

If you are traveling alone you might consider informing the staff at your accommodations of your condition in case of emergency.

Ask your doctor for a letter outlining your condition and what medication you usually take. If you are traveling within the United States ask for a prescription too — prescription rules vary in the U.S. from state to state, but it may help in an emergency.

You should also wear some form of medical ID jewelry — there are styles on the market now to suit every age and taste. Designs range from simple silicone or fabric wristbands costing a few dollars to etched metal bracelets, Pandora-style bracelets, watches and gold pendants with designs for men and women.

The latest innovation is ID jewelry incorporating a compact USB drive which can hold your entire medical history!

Some of this advice might seem over the top, but once organized you can relax and enjoy your trip secure in the knowledge that whatever happens, you have prepared for the worst.