

Hittin' the road with diabetes

Summer, it's the time of year for Kiwis and their families to pack up and travel by road, rail, boat or air to their favourite destination for some rest and relaxation.

People living with diabetes can still enjoy a holiday and slip into relaxation mode provided a little extra homework is done beforehand. Planning ahead will make holidaying much more enjoyable, eliminating the stress and last minute panic. Dr David Kerr, Endocrinologist, Physician and Editor of Diabetes Digest reports that about 10 percent of people with diabetes experience problems with diabetes control when travelling.

By planning ahead and taking extra precautions and ample supplies and medications it is possible to stay safe and ensure you have a pleasant and enjoyable holiday. Don't let diabetes get in the way or hold you back from enjoying life and exploring the world.

Diabetes NZ Auckland Branch has created a "Tips for Travel" brochure that is available for your use. It covers everything from what planning is required ahead of time and whilst travelling. If you would like a copy please contact services@diabetesauckland.org.nz or phone 09 623 2508.

A website video on travel is at www.yourdiabetes.org

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IN STORE AT DNZAB:

FRIO INSULIN TRAVEL BAGS | HYPOGLYCAEMIC KITS
TESTING SUPPLIES | TRAVEL SOCKS | SILICONE ID BRACELETS

Road trip It's harder to eat well and quickly while travelling by car but it is achievable. Pack a cooler and fill it with healthy snacks and ice cool water. Snacks like fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds as well as fibre-packed carbs and lean protein will keep you feeling full longer.



Activity No matter what mode of travel you choose, it is essential to stretch your legs regularly. If driving long distance, stop every two hours and take a brisk walk. When flying – especially long distance - it may be necessary to wear custom fitted compression stockings to prevent a clot in the leg, also known as Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). Walking on the plane isn't easy but it is essential. If you are more active than usual on holiday, frequent testing and monitoring your blood sugar levels is necessary. Remember – don't go barefoot – wear appropriate footwear wherever you go on your travels avoiding those nasty bites, foreign objects or sharp shells in your foot.



Alcohol Alcohol flows easily when relaxed and on holidays but it is important to pace yourself. Too much high carb alcohol, like beer or sugary cocktails can make your blood glucose spike. Pick wine or a light beer and try to avoid anything embellished with paper umbrellas.

Drink responsibly

Travelling does get weary. Drink to refuel, but be careful what you consume. Soft drinks, energy drinks and coffee might seem ideal but they are very high in calories and sugar – the easiest and most economical is water but if that's too boring then pick up lemons, limes or oranges and squeeze them into your water bottle. If you are unsure of the water supply, purchase bottled water, freeze it (they make wonderful ice coolers) and when thawed you have refreshing cool water to consume.



Up in the air Flying seems to pose the most challenges for people with diabetes. You have to navigate customs, security checks, airline food, possible delays, rescheduled flights and crossing time zones which can be a confusing task if having to adjust insulin regimens. To reduce the concerns or hassle, plan ahead and have suitable snacks available that you can take on board with you. Make sure you have emergency glucose supplies, your meter and insulin or medications close at hand in case you need to treat a hypo. Keep all your medications and official documents e.g. copies of GP letter and prescription with you in your hand luggage for safe storage and security checks.



Adjusting insulin

Crossing time zones is tricky so it is necessary to liaise with your GP or diabetes nurse specialist and have a travel plan for insulin adjustments before you leave the country because depending on your itinerary and activity levels you may need to adjust your insulin dosages. Testing more frequently is necessary to avoid hypos. Being a little more vigilant will avoid medical emergencies or disruption to your exciting travel plans.



Hand and carry-on luggage

All medication, including insulin should remain in hand luggage at all times when flying to prevent losing medication and freezing of insulin in baggage compartment. Insulin should not be exposed to excessive light, heat or cold. Ensure you have access to your meter, test strips, syringes and insulin, snacks and fast acting glucose. Flights may be delayed due to inclement weather, meals may be delayed because of turbulence, so be prepared with pre-packed snacks and consider dosing rapid acting insulin after your meal arrives.



Insulin pumps

Security checks could be embarrassing if you don't alert the airport staff that you are wearing a pump and that it is not any other "device". Due to the pressure changes at takeoff and landing some studies report that more insulin is delivered, therefore, it is probably safer to disconnect and reconnect once reaching cruising altitude.



Camping Keep meds and supplies cool using special cool packs (like Frio Cooling Wallets) or cooled water bottles. Do not expose insulin to extreme light, heat or cold as this minimizes the effectiveness of insulin, often to the point of complete ineffectiveness. Keep supplies, meters and insulin out of the sun. Insulin pumps can be disconnected before going in the water. Be careful when lying out in the sun, as the insulin can overheat in the tubing. Injections may be an alternative where insulin can be kept cool.

Hiking / tramping

Exploring the wilderness: the Frio Cooling Wallets also work well for day trips. Just run it under cold water for instructed time and the crystals in the pouch will keep insulin cool for hours. Test your sugar levels when exercising more and eat regular snacks – have them in your back pack at all times along with an emergency first aid kit with glucose supplies.

Don't go alone

You may be travelling on your own, however, alert someone on the journey about your diabetes (like the flight attendant) in case of an emergency and advise that a can of soft drink (not diet) or juice is required for a hypoglycaemic event.

