6 Best Travel Tips for Going Abroad with Diabetes

Traveling with diabetes doesn’t have to complicate your itinerary. With a little forethought, you’ll be able to keep your mind on sightseeing and not on glucose management.

1) Remember to pack snacks that are TSA-safe

When you are traveling, it can be hard to find nutritious snacks and almost impossible to keep food cold. Packing a quick-acting source of glucose is essential. For air travel, glucose tablets are a good option, as they will not raise eyebrows with TSA agents concerned about liquid carry on restrictions. Glucose tablets are also handy because they do not carry a risk of melting or becoming sticky, which can be a hassle if access to a sink is limited. Other snacks that can pass through security easily include whole grain crackers, trail mix, granola, dried fruit, seeds, rice cakes, and popcorn.

2) Make sure you are traveling with enough diabetic supplies

To avoid running out of supplies when you travel abroad, remember to pack about twice as much as you would normally use during the time your trip is scheduled to take. If you are traveling with companions, consider asking them to place some diabetic supplies in their carry on luggage. That way, if something happens to your luggage, your backup supply is still available. Do not check diabetic supplies, as checked bags are subject to extreme conditions such as fluctuations in temperature that can cause insulin to spoil.

3) Keep track of time-zone changes and adjust insulin dosing accordingly

Be mindful of time zone changes when you travel abroad, especially if you use an insulin pump to deliver doses at set times. If you do wear an insulin pump, remember to update the clock built into your pump to reflect the change in time zone. Modern, smart insulin pumps such as the Tandem t:slim pump make this easy to do with simple, smart phone-like touch screen controls, but with older models you may have to check your pump’s documentation to make changes in clock settings.

4) Keep important medical contact information with you

When traveling abroad, it is important to be able to reach your doctor. Remember to take your physician’s contact information along in hard copy, and program this information into your phone’s contacts. It may be helpful to travel with your prescriptions and prescription labels, as these can expedite airport screenings and allow you to replace your medications should you need to. Be certain to wear a medical identification bracelet that states you have diabetes, whether you take insulin, and an emergency contact phone number (with country code).

5) Be aware of your rights when passing through security screening checkpoints

Restrictions such as the “3-1-1” policy implemented by the TSA to regulate liquids allowed in carry on luggage are relaxed when those liquids are medically required. Permitted liquids include insulin, water, juice, and nutrition gels. Keep these medically required liquids separate from “3-1-1” liquids to facilitate the screening process. If you use an insulin pump, you are not required to disconnect or separately pack your insulin pump. You should inform the officer conducting your screening that you are wearing an insulin pump, as the officer will likely want to visually inspect and pat down the pump.

6) Keep a quick reference card or “cheat sheet” with you in case you encounter problems

A laminated 3x5 card with your doctor’s contact information, your emergency contact information, and translations of key phrases in the local language of your destination can be invaluable if problems arise during your trip. Consider listing translations for “I need medical help,” “where is the hospital,” “I am having a diabetic emergency, ” and “I need sugar.”