

# Diabetes Travel Guide

*Diabetes does not need to stop you from traveling on a day trip or a long vacation. Still, traveling may pose special challenges for people with diabetes.*

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## Before you go out of town, ask your doctor or diabetes educator for:

- Any written prescriptions you will need for diabetes pills or insulin.
- If you are on insulin, a letter saying that you have diabetes and take insulin shots. This is helpful when going through customs or airport security.
- Instructions for adjusting your medicines, especially insulin shots, if you are traveling across time zones.

## Take care of your medicines and supplies

- Carry your medicines (insulin, insulin needles, and diabetes pills) and your blood testing supplies with you. Never put them in your checked luggage.
- Take extra pills, needles, insulin, and blood testing strips when you travel, in case of loss or breakage. Don't count on buying extra supplies while traveling, especially when going to other countries, which may use different kinds of insulin and needles.
- Use insulated bags to carry your insulin so that it does not freeze or get too hot. When traveling by car, keep your insulin in a small cooler. Heat spoils insulin quickly.

## Take care of yourself

- Test your blood sugar before traveling, as well as during the trip, if it's more than a few hours.
- Carry snacks like fruit, crackers, or juice in case your blood sugar drops too low.
- Ask ahead of time for a diabetic meal if you are traveling by plane. Most airlines serve special meals for people with health needs.
- Take more than one pair of comfortable, well-fitting shoes on vacation. You will probably be walking more than usual and should take extra good care of your feet.
- Make healthy choices when you eat meals at restaurants or at friends' homes.

## Are you crossing time zones?

If you take insulin shots and will be crossing time zones, talk to your doctor or diabetes educator before your trip. Bring your flight schedule and information on time zone changes. Your doctor or educator can help you plan the timing of your meals and injections while you travel.

Remember: traveling eastward travel means a shorter day, so if you inject insulin, you may need less. Westward travel means a longer day, so more insulin may be needed.

To keep track of shots and meals through changing time zones, keep your watch or cell phone time setting on your home time zone until the morning after you arrive.

If you need to inject insulin while flying, be careful not to inject air into the insulin bottle. In the pressurized cabin, pressure differences can cause the plunger to "fight you." This can make it hard to measure insulin accurately.

Checking your blood glucose while traveling is as important as when you are at home. Also, check your blood glucose level soon after landing. Jet lag can make it hard to tell if you have very low or very high blood glucose.

**Patient Care Advice (PCOI)** documents are available under **Resources** on your Patient Gateway home page.

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