Travel checklist for people with diabetes

Rārangi hihira mā te hunga mate huka hāereere

If you're travelling internationally, you need to plan and make sure you have everything you need before you set off. Use this checklist to make sure you're well prepared.

Documents

- A letter for Customs and Airline Security on letterhead paper and written by your doctor. It should say that you have diabetes and need to carry needles, lancets, insulin vials and so on. It should also say that this equipment and medication must not be taken away from you. If you're wearing an insulin pump, the letter should also include this.
- Travel and medical insurance documents. Make sure you arrange these ahead of time.
- A card with emergency information, such as "I need sugar quickly" in the language (or languages) of where you're going.
- A travel plan for managing insulin adjustments while you're crossing time zones. Arrange this with your general practice team. Ask the airline for a flight itinerary that includes the length of flights and stopovers and times of meal service. These may be approximate.

Medications

- Insulin pens and spares and pen needles or syringes.
- Insulin or tablets or both. Keep them in their original boxes with the original pharmacy label clearly saying what they are. Carry twice as much as you think you'll need. If you're travelling with a companion, divide your insulin supplies between you.
- A glucagon kit in its original pharmacy-labelled container.
- Anti-emetic (anti-vomiting), travel sickness and anti-diarrhoea medication, electrolyte sachets and antibiotics. Talk to your general practice team about what you should take.

You may need to adjust the amount of insulin you take if you're changing time zones, going somewhere hotter or colder than you're used to or going to be more or less active than you usually are. Contact or your general practice team if you need advice.

Carry all your medications in your hand luggage. Keep your insulin in as cool a place as possible. Don't keep insulin in the glove box of a car. You should store your insulin in an insulated container to protect it from extreme temperatures.
Check with your airline for up-to-date rules about carrying medications on flights. If you want to know more, visit the Aviation Security Service's website (go to [www.aviation.govt.nz](http://www.aviation.govt.nz) and search for “plags”. the information on essential medicines is halfway down the page).

**Testing equipment**
- Blood glucose meter, plus spare batteries.
- Blood glucose tests strips in the original pharmacy-labelled boxes.
- Finger-pricker and lancets.
- Blood ketone test strips, if required.
- Diabetes record book.

Some countries use mg/dl on their meters. If you need to convert from mg/dl to mmol/l (for example, if you’re talking to a health professional in a country that uses this measure), divide the mg/dl by 18. To convert from mmol/l to mg/dl, multiply by 18.

**Food and fluids**
- Hypoglycaemia treatment, such as glucose tablets or jelly beans. Carry this in your hand luggage.
- Longer-acting carbohydrate snack food in sealed packages, such as muesli bars, dried fruit and nuts or crackers. Carry this in your hand luggage. Make sure you check what food you can carry into the countries you’re visiting.
- Fluids. Ask the flight attendants for fluids (diet and sweetened) as soon as you board the flight. There could be a delay in it being delivered.
- Ask the airline for diabetic meals when booking your flights but make sure there are enough carbohydrates in each meal or choose healthy options from the standard menu. Take some food options with you in case they can't give you a suitable diabetic meal.

**Other useful items**
- A basic first aid kit with plasters, antiseptic and so on.
- Comfortable shoes.
- Your medical alert bracelet or pendant.
- A small travel alarm clock or two watches if you need to adjust insulin and mealtimes when changing time zones.
- An insulated container or bag to store your insulin, meter and so on.

*Written by Christchurch Diabetes Centre. Adapted by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed November 2022.*