



# Have a great trip!

A practical guide  
to traveling with  
diabetes



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# Ready, set, go!

We all need a change of scenery now and then—whether it's a summer vacation, a weekend getaway or a business trip overseas. No matter what the destination, travel changes our regular routines, giving us new experiences and a fresh perspective.

People with diabetes know all about routines. Indeed, living with the disease and its demands can be stressful. When you travel with diabetes, you don't leave it behind. But with a little forethought and planning, it doesn't have to slow you down.

This booklet is designed to help you travel with ease and confidence. We hope you find it useful as you plan your next trip. Enjoy!



# Before you go



*Planning tips*

*Packing checklists*

*Packing tips*

For some people, doing the research and planning for a trip are a big part of the fun. If you have diabetes, planning is not only exciting, it's absolutely essential. Here are some tips, lists and suggestions to help you prepare for the journey and make the most of your travels.

## Planning tips

- If you're taking a long, exotic or strenuous trip, see your medical team for a checkup at least a month in advance.
- If you'll be crossing multiple time zones, take a copy of your flight schedule and itinerary to your checkup, and make a specific schedule for your medications and/or injections.
- If you're traveling to a foreign country, research their dining customs and become familiar with their foods. Knowing the carbohydrate content of common dishes in advance will give you more confidence to eat local cuisine.

- Learn key phrases in the appropriate language(s): “I have diabetes,” “I need insulin,” etc. A handy phrase booklet is included in this kit.
- Buy all necessary diabetes supplies (see checklist that follows) a few weeks before the trip in case the pharmacy has to order extra supplies for you.
- Complete your Diabetes ID Card (included in this kit) with current contact information for your doctor and pharmacy.
- Bring copies of any prescriptions for diabetes pills or insulin, just in case something happens to your supply. Record the generic drug name on your Doctor’s Declaration, since brand names vary in different countries.
- Gather numbers for medical resources at your destination, including a list of English-speaking foreign doctors ([www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org)).
- Contact your insurance provider to get instructions in case you require medical services outside the network or in foreign countries if traveling abroad.
- If you’re traveling by plane, contact your travel agent or airline about special meals for passengers with diabetes.

## Packing checklists

### General diabetes supplies

- Blood glucose meter with fresh batteries, test strips, lancing device, lancets and control solution(s)
- Spare meter, extra batteries and extra test strips (twice as many as you think you'll need)
- Glucose and/or snacks
- Diabetes ID Card (included in this kit)
- Doctor's Declaration (included in this kit)
- Any oral diabetes medication in its original, pharmacy-labeled container

### Additional supplies for insulin users

- Insulin (twice as much as you think you'll need)
- Insulin syringes
- Insulin pen(s) and cartridges (twice as many as you think you'll need)
- Insulated container for insulin (if traveling to extreme climates or longer than 30 days)

### Additional supplies for insulin pump users

- Spare batteries for insulin pump
- User's manual
- Adapter (if traveling abroad)
- Infusion sets and cartridges (twice as many as you think you'll need)
- IV prep and tape
- Everything you need for temporarily switching to insulin injections in case of pump malfunction (insulin, syringes, etc.)

### General first-aid kit

- Bandages, cotton balls, disinfectant
- Scissors, tweezers, nail clippers
- Painkillers
- Medications for diarrhea, nausea and constipation

### Hypoglycemic emergency kit

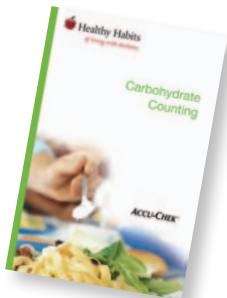
- Glucose tabs or quick-acting low blood sugar treatment
- Glucagon emergency kit

#### Quick tip

Always carry your Diabetes ID Card, no matter where you're going. In addition to your contact information, it details immediate measures to be taken in the event of a hypoglycemic emergency. You never know when you'll need it.

## Packing tips

- Bring twice as much as you think you'll need of everything (snacks, insulin, testing supplies). Really! It's easier than trying to track things down in unfamiliar places.
- Always keep your testing and insulin essentials in your purse, carry-on or day pack, along with a supply of healthy snacks.
- If you're flying with insulin, pack it all in your carry-on luggage—giving a portion to your traveling companion. If you pack it in your checked baggage, the temperature extremes of the cargo area could lead to spoilage.
- Keep your Diabetes ID Card (included in this kit) with you at all times. Carry your Doctor's Declaration (also included) if you are flying on an airplane, crossing borders or traveling abroad.
- If you use a carb counting book at home, pack one when you travel.
- Don't forget comfortable shoes!





# On your way



*Flying wisely*

*Going through security*

*Crossing time zones*

*Traveling by car, boat or train*

You've planned and packed and prepared for weeks. Now it's time to go! As you gather your luggage and get ready to hit the road, a few simple precautions will help you to enjoy the ride.

Regardless of your mode of travel, be sure to follow these guidelines:

- Check your blood glucose level before leaving your house.
- Keep your diabetes supplies—and snacks—with you at all times.
- Test every few hours during the journey. Check with your healthcare professional on recommended test frequency.

Beyond that, here are some specific suggestions based on your form of travel.

## **Flying wisely**

There's no quicker way to travel than flying. Unfortunately, flight delays, cancellations

and lost bags are fairly routine, so be sure to plan accordingly and make sure everything you need is always close at hand. On domestic routes, fewer airlines provide meals, so be sure your own food supply is ample. One last suggestion: if you are traveling alone, tell the flight attendant that you have diabetes so someone can respond appropriately if an emergency comes up.

## Going through security

People with diabetes occasionally experience difficulties at airports when traveling abroad since equipment such as pens, syringes, lancets and insulin pumps often arouse suspicion. Carrying a Diabetes ID Card (included in this kit) and Doctor's Declaration (also included) may help to clear up any confusion.

In the United States, most airport screeners have been trained to recognize diabetes-related equipment and supplies. Notify the screener that you have diabetes and are carrying your supplies with you. Although prescription labels are not legally required, carrying original packaging and prescription labels may help to expedite the security-checkpoint screening process.<sup>1</sup>

1. American Diabetes Association. Traveling with diabetes supplies. Available at: [http://www.diabetes.org/advocacy-and-legalresources/discrimination/public\\_accommodation/travel.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/advocacy-and-legalresources/discrimination/public_accommodation/travel.jsp). Accessed November 22, 2006.

## Crossing time zones

If you've ever traveled to Europe or Hawaii or gone from the East Coast to the West Coast, you've dealt with jet lag—and experienced how difficult it can be to adjust to a new time zone. As a person with diabetes, you need to monitor your blood sugar and adjust your treatment carefully to manage this transition.

### Adjust your insulin

If you take insulin, your schedule will need to be adjusted to accommodate the time zone of your destination. The simple rule is that you need to boost your insulin intake whenever the day gets longer (traveling from east to west) and decrease it whenever the day gets shorter (traveling from west to east).

#### Quick tip:

Consult your healthcare professional before embarking on a journey across time zones. Take a copy of your flight schedule and itinerary to your checkup, and make a specific schedule for your medications and/or injections.

## Traveling by car, boat or train

When you're traveling by car, you're in control, so you can stop or take breaks whenever necessary. If you're traveling with insulin and all other testing supplies, never leave them in the vehicle if the temperature inside might get too hot or cold.

Traveling by boat may make you seasick. If you do get ill, drink plenty of water and check your blood glucose more often. Medications for motion sickness can often help.

Rail travel is a relatively safe and reliable form of travel. Compared to airplane trips, you are less likely to face schedule disruptions and delays. Not all trains have food carts or restaurants, though, so be sure to pack plenty of snacks.

# While you're there



*Eating and drinking*

*Being active*

*Adjusting to time zones*

*Dealing with different conditions*

*Testing in extreme conditions*

Once you arrive at your destination, you'll probably be excited, relieved and perhaps exhausted. The stressful journey is over and the fun and adventure begin, with new situations and surroundings. No matter what the nature of your trip, your environment and routine will change. And as a result, your blood glucose levels will be more unpredictable. The solution? Check them often.

## **Eating and drinking**

The minute you leave home—whether you're crossing the state or the hemisphere—your eating habits will change. Whether the change is modest or major will dictate how much you need to adjust your diabetes testing and treatment routine. Keep in mind that mealtimes, portion sizes and ingredients can all vary depending on where you go. So do your research and plan ahead.

### **Be adventurous**

Discovering new and exotic foods is one of the most appealing aspects of travel. Just like at home, you should feel free to try new things and order unfamiliar dishes—especially if you’ve done some homework. If you’re eating at a restaurant, don’t take your insulin until the food actually arrives, since you never know exactly how long it will take or how much you will eat. Just to be on the safe side, monitor your blood glucose levels more often during the first few days to assess the effects of the dietary changes. Consult with your healthcare professional prior to your travel for their recommendations.

### **Be safe**

In terms of risks, travelers with diabetes should be aware that, in certain parts of the world, you should avoid street-vendor foods and be careful with water—drink only bottled water and other beverages served without ice.

### **Drink wisely**

Speaking of water, your body needs liquid, so be sure to stay hydrated with ample quantities of water. Increase your beverage intake if you are dehydrated from plane travel or increased activity. And don’t forget that if temperatures are warm, your body needs more liquid. Just like at home, drink alcoholic beverages in moderation only.

## Got snacks?

Of course, always remember to take snacks with you wherever you go—whether it's a day trip or an extended vacation. Apples, bananas, oranges, crackers and yogurt make great, healthy snacks. If you need emergency carbs, you can get them from glucose tabs, hard candy, sugar cubes, regular cola, fruit juice or lemonade.

## Being active

One of the best aspects of travel is having new experiences and seeing new places and things. Many travelers find that they are more active than usual—exploring sites, visiting landmarks or simply getting out and about. On the other hand, you may find yourself with extended periods of limited activity—on a long car ride, on an overseas plane ride or in a daylong meeting.

In general, you simply need to be aware of whether your activity levels are similar to or different from your routine at home. If they are similar, you already know what to do. If they are different, careful monitoring and more frequent testing will help you stay on track. Follow your healthcare professional's recommendation.

## Watch your steps

The more active you are, the more energy your body needs, and the more likely your blood glucose level could drop too low.

Anticipate the situation and be prepared—by testing and packing snacks.

If you know you'll be getting significantly more exercise than usual when traveling—whether it's playing tennis or climbing pyramids—it probably makes sense to see your healthcare team for a thorough check-up and advice before you go.

## Keep moving

In contrast, extended sedentary periods can cause your blood glucose to run high. Again, don't guess—check. You can adjust accordingly by eating fewer carbs at your next meal or snack. If you are forced to be sedentary for a long period of time, be sure to get up and move around every hour or two to reduce your risk of blood clots.

### Quick tip

Good, comfortable shoes are essential for traveling—especially if you have diabetes. Avoid brand-new shoes, and be sure to check your feet often for swelling, infection or blisters.

## Adjusting to time zones

If you're traveling across several time zones, you'll need to be sure that you properly adjust your insulin or medication schedule to correspond to the new time. For guidelines on doing this, see page 10 in the "On Your Way" section of this brochure. Assuming that you've made the transition, you'll still need to pay close attention to the timing of your meals and check your blood glucose more frequently per your healthcare professional's recommendation. Jet lag can mask symptoms that might normally alert you to high or low blood sugar.

## Dealing with different conditions

If the conditions at your travel destination are significantly different than what you're used to at home, you may need to make some adjustments to your routine. Temperature, humidity and altitude differences can affect your body—and your testing equipment—in a variety of ways.

If you're headed someplace with extreme conditions, check the weather prior to departure. Knowing what to expect when you get there can help you plan and act accordingly. Above all, if you're going to be out in extreme conditions, use your common sense and pack appropriate clothing and gear.

## Testing in extreme conditions

### Heat and high humidity levels

The optimum temperature for testing your blood glucose level can vary depending on the type of test strip your blood glucose monitoring system uses. For example, an ACCU-CHEK® Aviva test strip has an operating temperature range of 43° F – 111° F. You can find this information in the test strip package insert. Generally speaking, if your destination is hot or humid, it is a good idea to remove your test strip and immediately recap the container to prevent air exposure. In all other aspects, the testing procedure should be the same as usual.

### Cold weather

If you're taking a winter trip to a cold destination, carry your blood glucose meter and test strips close to your body to keep them warm. If you're testing outdoors, be sure to take the reading while you're sheltered from the wind to get precise and reliable results.

### High altitudes

Altitudes (up to 10,150 feet) have no effect on the accuracy or effectiveness of ACCU-CHEK blood glucose meters, although they can make you feel short of breath.

# Special circumstances



*Children with diabetes  
Insulin pump users*

This booklet is filled with general tips and recommendations for people traveling with diabetes. Here are some further suggestions for individuals with specific situations and needs.

## **Children with diabetes**

Kids with diabetes are kids first. They have the same dreams and needs as other children—plus a few more. Traveling with children always requires extra preparation, effort and supplies. With diabetes in the picture, you need to be even more diligent about your planning and packing.

### **Traveling with your own child**

It's best to take along all the routines you've already figured out for checking and treating blood glucose levels. The rule of thumb from other sections is also appropriate for your child: changes in routine and activity can influence blood sugar levels and insulin needs.

## When your child is traveling with someone else

If your child will be traveling without you—with a relative, friend or school group—you'll want to make special preparations to ensure a smooth trip. Meet with the adult in charge to review your child's daily routines. Discuss what to do in case of an emergency. Write down as much as possible. This booklet would be a helpful resource, but you will also want to provide general diabetes information and instructions specific to your child. Encourage frequent monitoring per your healthcare professional's recommendation—and communication—to plan a carefree trip.

## Insulin pump users

You already know how to use your pump and are familiar with its functions. And you're aware of the many advantages of an insulin pump, especially when traveling. Here are a few additional points to consider.

### Travel preparations

When traveling abroad, be sure to carry your Doctor's Declaration (included with this kit) with you at all times, stating that it is necessary for you to wear the insulin pump. This may help to reduce unpleasant surprises at security checkpoints or customs. To avoid awkward situations, explain to the screeners or security personnel what the insulin pump is before you are patted down.

## Assistance when traveling

People traveling with you need to be aware of your diabetes and should know how to use your insulin pump so that they can help in an emergency (e.g., glucagon injections, disconnecting the insulin pump).

## Time zones and insulin pumps

If your journey involves the gain or loss of just one or two hours across time zones, simply reset your insulin pump to the local time at your destination.

Set the insulin pump to the destination time zone at any time during your flight. Set your basal rate to a constant daytime basal rate over the 24-hour schedule for the pump while traveling. Test your blood glucose several times during the trip. Bolus to cover snacks, meals and elevated blood glucose levels. Then, when you arrive at your destination, reset your multiple basal rates based on your blood glucose readings and the destination time zone.

We hope this booklet helps you plan for many exciting and wonderful travel adventures. Have a great trip!





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OF LIVING WITH DIABETES

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Roche Diagnostics, the maker of ACCU-CHEK products, offers new, easier ways to manage your diabetes—so you can go beyond living life to loving life.

To download an electronic copy of this material, please visit **accu-chek.com**.

#### **SOURCES**

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