



# Holiday Tips

*A charity supporting and listening to people who live with diabetes*

HELPLINE: 01604 622837  
[www.iddt.org](http://www.iddt.org)

## Holiday tips

Whether going on holiday abroad or in this country, it may be the first time you have travelled since your diabetes or your child's diabetes was diagnosed. We hope that this information will give you a few practical tips and help you to plan ahead for your holiday. There is one thing to remember - anticipation of holidays and the day of travel causes excitement, especially in children.

## General tips

- Excitement can affect blood glucose levels, so it is important to test regularly and be prepared for some low blood glucose levels.
- Hypos may be unexpected due to changes in routine, in temperatures or in the amount of exercise taken, such as swimming or sightseeing, so always be prepared. It is a good idea to take plenty of glucose tablets with you because they won't melt, leak or become sticky in high temperatures.
- When travelling always wear identification that states you have diabetes, especially if you take insulin, and if possible, gives an emergency telephone number.

## Precautions when travelling by air

Insulin should not be packed in your suitcase. This will be placed in the hold where the temperature can be below freezing and this is likely to damage your insulin. Your blood glucose meter should also not be packed in the hold.

- Carry two lots of insulin, testing equipment and syringes/ pens and distribute them between two different lots of hand luggage. If you use an insulin pump, always take spares and

a syringe in case of pump failure. Luggage does get lost and it could prove difficult to replace your diabetes equipment.

- You should always carry a card to say that you or your child has diabetes. You will need a letter from your GP to explain that you have to carry insulin and other diabetes equipment on board with you. Once you have this letter, it can be used again for future trips. It is a good idea to make several copies of this letter.
- Always take more insulin than you need in case of breakages. The country that you are travelling to may not have the type of insulin you need. It is also a good idea to take an extra prescription with you, just in case.
- When you come home it is sensible to throw away the insulin you took on holiday as heat, bright light and vibration can all damage it and make it less effective.
- It is worth remembering that ordering a 'diabetic' meal on flights often means that they are low in carbohydrates, so it is probably not a good idea. On long journeys it is a good idea to have snacks to hand in case there are long periods without meals.

## Precautions for pump users

### Flying – cabin pressure can affect insulin delivery

It is safe to fly with insulin pumps but taking precautions is necessary because changes in cabin pressure during take-off and landing can affect insulin delivery. Before your flight, notify the airline, carry a medical letter from your doctor and ensure your pump and spare supplies are in your carry-on luggage.

Researchers in Australia have reported that changes in cabin pressure during flights may cause insulin pumps to deliver too much or too little insulin which could possibly put sensitive

diabetes patients at risk. Those who are very sensitive to small changes in insulin doses are the ones who are going to be most sensitive to this – children and adults on small doses.

After learning about a 10-year-old girl with Type 1 diabetes whose blood sugar dropped about an hour after take off, the researchers found cases of other pump users with the same problem during flights. They put 10 pumps on a commercial flight and found that during take off, when the air pressure is decreasing, the pumps delivered about 1 to 1.4 extra units of insulin. During the descent, when pressure was increasing, about 1 unit of insulin was sucked back into the pumps causing them to give out too little insulin.

To prevent dangers when flying, they recommend the following:

- The pump should be disconnected before take off, then remove air bubbles and reconnect while cruising.
- Disconnect again before landing and prime the line with 2 units of insulin after landing before reconnecting permanently.
- The pump should also be disconnected during flight emergencies when there is a big drop in cabin pressure.
- Check your blood glucose more frequently throughout the flight.

However, there are other researchers that say this does not seem to be a frequent and recurring problem. It is possible that other big changes in pressure could cause pumps to deliver too much or too little insulin, such as ski-lifts.



## Time zones

Generally short-haul flights require little or no adjustment and insulin injections can be carried out as normal. It is advisable to wait until the meal has arrived before injecting to avoid hypoglycaemia.

Longer journeys that cross time zones are more complicated and it is a good idea to discuss this with your diabetes nurse beforehand. Westbound journeys extend the day and extra insulin may be needed. Multi-dose regimes make this easier because rapid-acting insulin can be given every 3 to 4 hours as needed. Eastbound journeys shorten the day and so the time between injections. It may be necessary to reduce the dose of long-acting or pre-mixed insulin. It can be helpful to keep your watch on 'home' time to keep track of your insulin doses.

If you take tablets to treat your diabetes, you are unlikely to have any particular problems. Very occasionally, it may be necessary to take extra tablets to cover a longer day or leave out one dose of tablets on a short day, when you are travelling on a long west to east journey but you should discuss this with your diabetes care team before you go.

### **Crossing time zones and using an insulin pump, CGM or Freestyle Libre**

When crossing different time zones, you may need to change the time or date on some insulin pumps manually so you get the correct basal insulin dose. Speak with your healthcare provider before you travel to get their advice on which settings to change and when.

If you use an app, the date and time on smartphones should automatically update when travelling across time zones. If you use a Freestyle Libre reader, you will manually need to adjust the time for accurate reports.

## How hot weather affects people with diabetes

Heat and humidity can be challenging for people with diabetes, especially if there are underlying complications. Diabetes can interfere with your body's ability to keep cool and this can make it harder to regulate temperature and hydration in hot weather. In turn this has direct effects on blood glucose levels. Here are several ways hot weather affects diabetes.

- **Reduced ability to sweat:** Nerve damage (neuropathy) can impair sweat glands, making it harder for your body to cool down naturally.
- **Sunburn and stress:** Painful sunburn can cause your body to release stress hormones, which may raise blood sugar levels.
- **Dehydration:** People with diabetes may become dehydrated faster so as fluid levels drop, blood glucose becomes more concentrated and can rise.
- **Confusion symptoms:** Fatigue, dizziness and nausea can be symptoms of dehydration, hypoglycaemia, hyperglycaemia or heat exhaustion and this makes it difficult to pinpoint the cause. It's not always easy to tell if you're dizzy because you're dehydrated or because your blood sugar is dropping, so checking your blood sugar frequently in the heat is important and removes the guesswork.

### Tips for managing diabetes in hot weather

Planning ahead is key when managing diabetes in the summer, starting with hydration, sun safety and making sure your devices are protected from the heat.

- **Avoid peak sun hours:** Opt for early morning or evening activities to avoid the worst of the heat.
- **Stay hydrated:** Carry a water bottle with you at all times and sip consistently throughout the day. Aim for water or electrolyte drinks and avoid alcohol or sugary beverages.

- **Dress for the weather:** Wear loose-fitting clothing and light colours to reflect sunlight. A wide-brimmed hat can provide extra protection.
- **Use sunscreen:** A broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher can help prevent burns that could trigger stress-related blood sugar spikes.
- **Monitor blood sugar frequently:** Check levels more often than usual, especially before and after outdoor activities.
- **Have snacks on hand:** In the case of low blood sugar, always carry fast-acting carbs like glucose tablets or juice.
- **Don't exercise in extreme heat:** Opt for indoor workouts or water-based activities when temperatures are high.

### **Frequency of severe hypoglycaemia reduced in milder climates**

Research has shown that people with diabetes experience more incidents of severe hypoglycaemia during hotter and colder weather. 2,500 people living in Hamburg were involved in the research which showed that severe hypos increased by 18% in higher temperatures and 15% in colder climates when compared with what the researchers describe as 'the thermal comfort zone' of temperatures between 10 and 20 degrees C. The other interpretation of these findings is that severe hypoglycaemia is reduced in milder climates.

Only 8% of moderate hypoglycaemic episodes took place outside, but when the researchers specifically looked at severe hypos that happened outside, the rate jumped to 21% in higher temperatures and 13% in cooler conditions. The researchers say these findings could be clinically relevant but the underlying mechanisms for this are unknown.

*(Journal of Diabetes and its Complications, Feb 2017)*

## Beating jetlag

Travelling across several time zones will probably cause some degree of jet lag. Symptoms include daytime sleepiness, fatigue, disorientation, poor concentration, headache and irritability. There are a number of ways to relieve jetlag:

- Avoid caffeine and alcohol on the plane - drink plenty of water or fruit juice.
- Eat modestly at times that correspond to the usual mealtimes as this will help your body to readjust to the new time zone.
- After a westward flight, stay awake while there is daylight and try to sleep when it is dark.
- After an eastward flight, get up in the morning but avoid bright light and go outdoors in the afternoon.
- Take moderate exercise, perhaps by sightseeing.

## Holiday Insurance

If you or your child has diabetes, travel agents are not the best people to provide holiday insurance. It is better to shop around for insurance but you should always declare your diabetes and any other medical conditions, otherwise you may not be covered if anything goes wrong and you need to use the insurance.

The UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) lets you get necessary state healthcare in the European Economic Area (EEA) and some other countries on the same basis as a resident of that country. This may be free or it may require a payment equivalent to that which a local resident would pay.

The UK GHIC has replaced the existing European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). If you have an existing EHIC you can continue to use it until the expiry date on the card. Once it

expires, you'll need to apply for a UK GHIC to replace it. You can apply for a new card up to 9 months before your current card expires. A UK GHIC is free and lasts for up to 5 years.

You can apply for your new card through the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/>

If you do not have internet access, you can apply by telephone on 0300 330 1350.

You should avoid unofficial websites – they may charge you a fee to apply.

### What to pack in your hand luggage

- All diabetes medication
- Diabetes supplies – including sensors and other device spares
- Diabetes identity card or another form of ID such as a wrist band
- A letter from your doctor about your diabetes and treatment and if you use an insulin pump, CGM or flash glucose monitor
- A list of the insulin and drugs you take
- Hypo treatments
- Extra snacks in case of delays like nuts, fruit or a sandwich
- Split meds between separate bags if you can, for example, if you're travelling with a partner or friend, in case you lose something.



## Tips from readers

We collect tips from our members to pass on.

Here's a tip from a couple who regularly fly abroad to Italy and France and although the lady carries medical equipment relating to her diabetes, her husband has a medical condition that requires him to carry equipment that includes a small pair of scissors. As advised he carries a letter from his GP, as should anybody carrying insulin pens, syringes blood testing equipment and any sharps. This had proved to be fine when flying into major airports but, when they flew into a more provincial airport where the customs officers did not understand the letter as they could not read English, this resulted in unpleasant and unnecessary searches of both his body and luggage. On their return home, they were advised to use Google Translator (<https://translate.google.co.uk/>) to get French and Italian versions of the letter. Since then they have flown to several provincial airports and have had no further problems. So, if you are travelling abroad and taking diabetes supplies with you, then consider getting the letter you have from your GP translated into the relevant language to avoid any potential problems.

Another of our members regularly flies to Thailand and he advises notifying airports in advance that you will be carrying medication and sharps. His second piece of advice applies to anyone travelling to hot countries to purchase a digital thermometer that not only tells you the current temperature but also records the highest and lowest temperatures. This can then be placed in the fridge alongside supplies of insulin and used to adjust the temperature of the fridge to ensure it is running at the optimum temperature for storing insulin.

## The Golden Rules - with or without diabetes

1. Obtain comprehensive travel insurance, and read the small print.
2. Research your destination – know the local laws and customs.
3. Obtain a letter from your GP if you are carrying insulin and sharps on a flight.
4. Tell someone where you are going and leave them emergency contact details.
5. Take enough money and have access to emergency supplies.

### Useful Resources

Obtaining your GHIC health insurance card

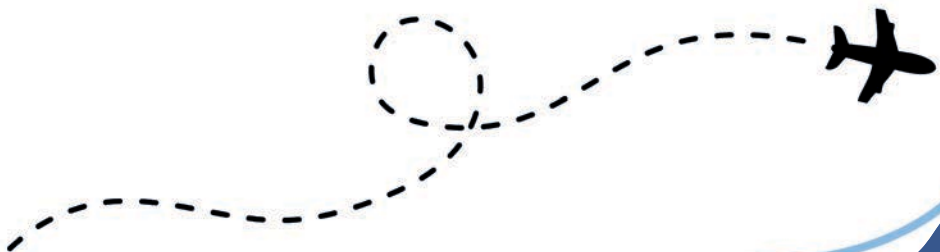
<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/>

If you do not have internet access, you can apply by telephone on 0300 330 1350.

### The Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>

This office can help Britons abroad through its embassies, high commissions and consulates. Consular assistance is available in various circumstances such as hospitalisation or when some serious crimes against British people have been committed.



## Temperatures and insulin

### Heat

Heat increases the circulation in the skin and increases the absorption of insulin when it is injected. Research has shown that at room temperature of 30°C, injected insulin was absorbed was three to five times greater than at 10°C which lowers blood glucose levels.

This lowering of blood sugars increases the risk of hypos and both heat and hypoglycaemia cause sweating and lethargy which can lead to delayed recognition of hypos. Therefore, it is important to glucose test more in hot weather.

### Cold

Cold slows down the absorption of insulin. If there has been an accidental insulin overdose, applying a cold pack to the injection site delays the hypoglycaemic effect. However, when the site warms up, the insulin will be absorbed which risks hypoglycaemia sometimes hours later.

## Keep your insulin cool

There are different methods and carrying cases for keeping insulin and insulin pens cool.

### FRÍO® wallets to keep insulin cool

The FRÍO® insulin cooler keeps in-use insulin and other temperature sensitive-medications cool and safe, within safe temperatures of 18-26°C (64.4-78.8°F) for a minimum of 45 hours, even in a constant environmental temperature of 37.8°C (100°F).

Lasting up to 5 times longer than ice packs, make FRÍO® part of your everyday life. The main advantages



are no more bulky, inconvenient packs or vacuum flasks needed ever again and you do not have to worry about finding a freezer to get supplies of ice and the wallet is light to carry.

It is activated by immersing it in cold water for 5-15 minutes. The panels of the wallet contain crystals and these expand into gel with the immersion in water. The system relies on the evaporation process for cooling.

For further details or to order a FRIO wallet the manufacturers can be contacted at: FRIO UK, PO Box 10, Haverfordwest SA62 5YG. Telephone 01437 741700, e-mail: [info@friouk.com](mailto:info@friouk.com) or visit: [www.friouk.com](http://www.friouk.com).

### **Kitbags to keep diabetes equipment in one place**

Desang kitbags can keep all the tools for managing diabetes (blood testing kit, sugar supply and insulin as well as space for personal notes) in one place. They vary in price according to whether you chose a PVC one or a luxury leather one.

You can buy on-line by visiting: [www.desang.net](http://www.desang.net)

### **Diabetic holiday foot syndrome**

Research has shown that there is a greater risk of foot ulceration that can lead to serious complications during holidays, especially those taken in hot countries, hence the name 'Diabetic holiday foot syndrome'. Among 435 people studied, 17 experienced foot lesions during foreign holidays, 10 of whom reported a foot lesion for the first time. The people with holiday foot damage were a younger age, mainly male and their diabetes was of shorter duration.

The causes of diabetic holiday foot syndrome were:

- direct injury
- unaccustomed exercise

- walking barefoot on the beach or in the sea
- burns from walking barefoot on hot pavements
- wearing inappropriate inflexible bathing shoes.

If you need further warnings for your holidays, the research also showed that nine out of the 17 people had to be hospitalised for infections as a result of the foot damage and the average stay in hospital was 11 days.

The researchers conclude that there is a need to increase education about foot care at holiday periods and that this should include preventative measures for those people at high risk of foot lesions.

### **Just a warning - weight increase while on holiday!**

Travel often involves changes in routine, higher salt intake, eating out more, increased calories, especially from alcohol and less movement, all of which can lead to temporary bloating and water retention. Additionally, indulging in extra calories over several days can result in a slight fat gain, but it's not as drastic as it may feel.

### **Simple steps to combat sunburn**

The British Skin Foundation has issued advice on what to do if you do get sunburnt. Here they are:

- Keep the sunburnt area covered, stay in the shade until it has healed and wear cotton clothing.
- Over-the-counter analgesics or painkillers can relieve the pain and reduce any inflammation (if there are no contraindications).
- Cool the skin by applying a cool, compress for 15 minutes or by having a cool bath / shower. Do not rub your skin with a towel, just pat it dry.

- Reduce peeling by using un-perfumed cream or lotion after a bath or shower to soothe the skin and repeat this as necessary.
- Leave blisters alone, do not pop them as this can lead to infection and scarring.
- Rehydrate as sunburn can lead to fluid loss through the skin, so drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol.

### **Finally – a few reminders**

- Drink plenty of water as dehydration can raise blood glucose levels.
- Sunburn can raise blood glucose levels, so avoid spending long hours in the sun and wear sunscreen of at least 30 SPF and children or people with pale skin should use 50 SPF.
- Shield your meter from the sun and test strips should be kept in a cool, dry place.
- People who use a pump may need to protect the adhesive patch from perspiration by using an antiperspirant at the contact site.
- In very hot weather insulin is absorbed more quickly, so test regularly to avoid hypos.

***Perhaps worth remembering.....it is holiday, so enjoy it!***





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to visit our website

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