

## **FOOD AND FLYING FOR PEOPLE WITH DIABETES**

'Balance' checks in to find out some top tips for eating whilst airborne.

When it comes to the meals served on planes, 'diabetic' versions often contain less carbohydrate than standard meals - so stick with the standard one.

If, because of its size, the standard meal doesn't provide enough carbohydrate either, ask a flight attendant for some extra carbohydrate such as fruit, crackers or bread rolls. Contact the airline in advance to find out the time your meal will be served.

But be prepared for delays - you may need to adjust your injection times and doses, and to eat extra snacks.

Crossing time zones may involve adjustments to insulin too. When travelling east to west, the day is lengthened - so you may need extra food alongside extra insulin. When travelling west to east, the day is shortened - so your carbohydrate and insulin intake may need to be reduced. Plan your particular flight with your healthcare team.

Finally, have lots of sugar-free drinks to help avoid becoming dehydrated. Alcohol can accelerate dehydration, so it's best avoided - but if you must, drink it in moderation.

### **Packing check-list**

Always carry your diabetes equipment as hand luggage (especially insulin - the low temperature of the aircraft's hold damages it). Take a doctor's letter explaining your need to do this, in order to avoid potential security problems.

Take plenty of carbohydrate snacks, such as biscuits, cereal bars, sandwiches, individual cartons of Unsweetened fruit juice, glucose tablets and boiled sweets. Pack these in your hand luggage, so they're easy to get to at any time.

Have some foreign currency in coins - some countries' quarantine laws mean you have to hand over your snacks after landing, so you'll need to restock once through customs.

Further information

Travel and diabetes (8025, £2.00) is available from Diabetes UK on 0800 585 088. ©

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[www.diabetes.org.uk/faq/trav.htm](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/faq/trav.htm) - travelling with diabetes

[www.medicalwatches.com](http://www.medicalwatches.com) - a very informative editorial titled 'Management for diabetes during Intercontinental travel'

[www.medicalwatches.com](http://www.medicalwatches.com) - link here to another very necessary editorial called 'Syringes for Insulan and Glucagon....tighter Airline security'

[www.diabetesnow.co.uk/summer2002/travel1.asp](http://www.diabetesnow.co.uk/summer2002/travel1.asp) - a very helpful travel website

[www.scottish-internet.co.uk/clients/diabetestravel/home.htm](http://www.scottish-internet.co.uk/clients/diabetestravel/home.htm) - excellent and very full of information website.

'The Diabetes Travel Guide' - by Davida F. Kruger. Available to order on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

**Plan Ahead - by Liz Rosies of [www.travelhealth.co.uk](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk)**

Whenever you travel it is essential to plan ahead. A visit to your Diabetic Adviser or GP as soon as you are aware of your travel schedule is a good place to start. If you plan carefully now, you will save yourself from a lot of trouble later on.

### **Plan Ahead**

It is important to think through your trip. Research your destination carefully and think through the practicalities of how long you plan to be away, and what kind of activities you plan to take part in - will you be more or less active than you normally are at home? And what about food, do you easily adapt to other foods or will you have a hard time finding something you like to eat?

### **Air Travel and Insulin**

When you travel by air it is not always necessary to order "diabetic meals". Check your carbohydrate intake regularly and, if required, top-up with snacks on the journey. When travelling by air don't be afraid to ask a flight attendant for more food or a slice of bread if you need it. When you are about to eat on a flight, don't take your insulin until you see the food coming down the aisle - all kinds of things can cause a hold up or delay in it getting to you! When flying keep your insulin with you at all times. Insulin should always be carried in your hand luggage, out of direct sunlight or freezing conditions - such as an aeroplane hold!

If your insulin comes in U-100 check the conversion rate in countries where it comes in U-40 or U-80. In this situation it will be essential to get new syringes to avoid dosage mistakes. If you use a pen delivery system for your insulin, ensure that you carry a spare device when travelling.

Adjust your insulin times when you reach your destination - you will have already discussed this with your diabetic adviser but just to remind you: *When travelling WEST* lengthen the gap between insulin doses or add extra food with an extra dose until adjusted. *When travelling EAST* shorten the gap between doses and reduce dosages.

### **Arriving at your Destination**

Finally arriving at your destination is a very exciting time - make sure you have pre-booked a hotel for the first few nights so that you have time to readjust to your schedule and surroundings. Always check your blood sugar at regular intervals when you cross time zones, as you might need to adjust your dosages. Remember perfect control might not be possible in the first few days, but keep working at it. - Liz Rosies at [www.travelhealth.co.uk](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk)