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## MANAGING DIABETES While Travelling

**Dr. Jibin John Thomas**  
Internal Medicine  
International Clinic



**T**raveling is an enriching experience that opens new horizons and cultures. For individuals with **diabetes**, however, it requires careful planning and consideration to ensure a smooth and enjoyable journey. Just because diabetes is your constant companion doesn't mean you can't enjoy traveling. Managing diabetes while traveling demands proactive measures to maintain health and well-being away from the familiar environment. One of the most profound aspects of traveling is the opportunity for self-discovery. Stepping outside one's comfort zone fosters personal growth and self-confidence. Exposure to different cultures and ways of life challenges preconceptions, fostering open-mindedness and understanding. Traveling encourages individuals to reflect on their beliefs, values, and priorities, contributing to a deeper understanding of oneself. In this article, Let us explore some practical tips and insights for individuals with diabetes embarking on a journey.

In our modern society, **diabetes, a chronic condition** that affects millions worldwide, has become a pervasive health concern. Diabetes is characterized by elevated blood sugar levels, requiring vigilant management to prevent complications and promote overall well-being. This article delves into the multifaceted aspects of diabetes, how to plan, how to manage diabetes on the go and how to carry medications and injectables during travel as well as

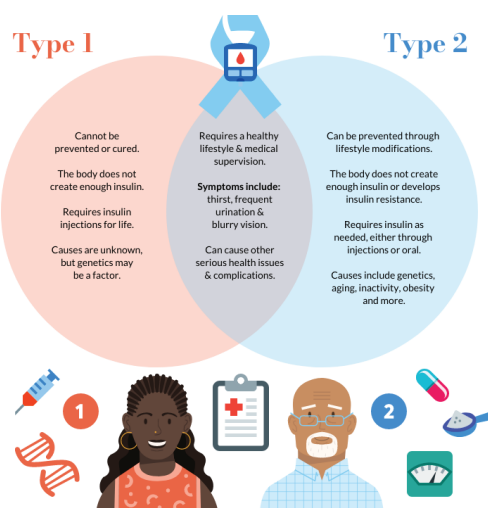


how to keep blood sugars under control during the entire busy journey .

### Preparing to Travel- Know your Type.

Most people with Diabetes fail to understand what type of Diabetes they have. Knowing the Type of Diabetes is very Important before embarking on a journey. Diabetes appears in two primary forms: **Type 1 and Type 2**. Type 1 diabetes results from the immune system mistakenly attacking and destroying insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. On the other hand, Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body either doesn't produce enough insulin or becomes resistant to its effects. Treatment differs for both as Type 1 demands absolute Insulin Necessity whereas the latter demands a mixed regimen according to the blood sugar levels.





Consult Your Doctor weeks before you start the journey. It's imminent to plan your medications with your doctor before packing your clothes and boots first .Your doctor who knows the type of diabetes you are having & will certainly advice you on how to carry your medications and injectables (if needed ) , adjustment of dosages of medications and injectables before the journey, as well as how to keep your Blood sugars at the baseline so as to avoid both Hypo glycemia (low sugar level) and hyper glycemic (High sugar level). Well before you travel, have a complete health examination. This will help ensure your diabetes is under control and give you enough time to get any needed vaccines, as well as time to recover from any side effects.

### Packing Medications & Low Glycemic Supplies

Consider carrying extra diabetes medications, Insulin, test strips, and other necessary supplies in case of unforeseen delays or loss of luggage. Ensure you pack more than enough. To minimize the risk of losing everything in the case of misplaced baggage, divide your supplies between your carry-on and checked luggage. It is most necessary that you have at least two copies of your Prescriptions from your doctor with the doctor's attestation so that in any case your supplies get lost, or supplies happen to get over, needed medications can be purchased from a local pharmacy

or even easier to show a doctor at your place of Disembarkment.



a) **Carrying Injectables** -To carry Insulin make sure you have Insulated cooler bag or a Reusable ice gel pack & a thin hand towel to wrap around the ice gel packs (if the insulated bag has no compartments) Do not check in your insulin. The insulin will loose its effectiveness as the temperature in the Luggage compartment in check in may make it frozen. Keep insulin in the inner compartment of your insulated bag (to be hand-carried with you). Store the freezable ice gel pack in the pouch compartment. If there is no compartment to store the ice gel packs, place a hand towel on top of the ice gel pack, and the insulins on top of the towel. On arrival at the destination, keep the unopened insulin pens/ cartridges/vials in the fridge.

b) **Oral Medication & Tablets** can be packed together along with a prescription copy to avoid unnecessary delay at the airport check in as well as on disembarkment. Carry medicines in the original pharmacy bottles or ask your pharmacist to print out extra labels you can attach to plastic bags. Make sure you keep your medication in both hand carry as well as in check in luggage to be on the safer side.

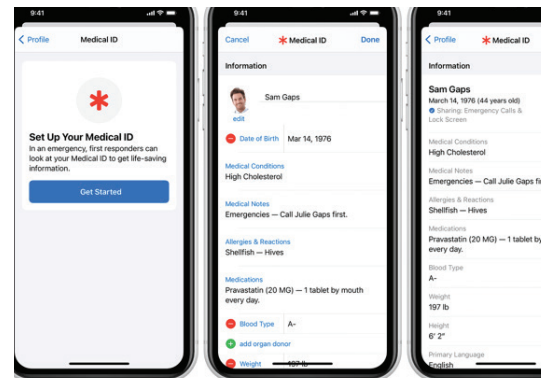
c) Be sure to pack **healthy snacks, like nuts/almonds, raw veggies**, and as well as other low glycemic, High-fiber foods that have a low glycemic index, which is important for blood sugar control. Avoid Carrying perishable food items as well as canned food items

which are not good options for diabetes. Balanced meals keep blood sugar under control all around the clock. Eat your protein (vegetarian or non-vegetarian) with fiber-rich vegetables, high-quality starch or carbs, and healthy fats to create a blood-sugar-friendly meal that won't derail any progress you've made on your diabetic friendly journey. Staying hydrated all the time is a key aspect in maintaining your blood sugar levels. Dehydration can cause hypoglycemia, which can be very dangerous during a journey.

d) **Be Active**, the importance of every journey is sight-seeing, visiting places of utmost importance, monuments, palaces, historical sites etc. Make it a point to walk more during these activities, stay active, well hydrated to keep the blood sugars constantly in the baseline. Please note that at any point of your journey you need to be cautious and must identify any symptoms of Low Sugar (hypoglycemia). In any such emergency make sure you have in your pocket or belt bag/bumbag a Sublingually dissolvable glucose tablet or small glucose sachet which can easily correct Hypoglycemia. Always carry snacks and water to stay fueled during these physical activities which may involve walking, hiking or exploratory tours.

### Identify Yourself - Importance of Medical ID

To Travel is Fun, whether traveling individually or as family, there is abounding amount of fun involved with any travel. Wear your medical bracelet or necklace that shows you have diabetes and takes insulin (if you do). Now days all new smartphones have an sos medical ID or a health Application. Make sure your health App is updated and active during your journey. Bring a doctor's note that explains you have diabetes and lists your medications, as well as a prescription in case you need more. Carry a health card that includes your emergency contact and doctor's name and phone number. Learn how to say or write small cards in your pocket with "I have diabetes," "sugar," and "needs insulin" or "water". Smartphones with Translate options is a "great friend in need" during the entire Journey.



### Time Zone & Routine Blood Sugar Monitoring

Traveling across different time zones can lead to jet lag, a temporary sleep disorder that occurs when the body's internal clock is out of sync with the time in the new destination, also confusions regarding timing of medication, insulin dosing and many other disruptions of daily routine. Therefore, this means that when it is morning in Kuwait, it is generally nighttime in the Eastern United States. The time zone difference can affect a patients know how to take the medications and food patterns. Here are few Easy to Learn tips on how to be confident with medications and Injectables during Travel.

#### 1-Discuss with Your Doctor & Nutritionist (Diabetes Educator):

Before your trip, consult with your healthcare team, including your doctor and diabetes educator. Inform them about your travel plans (country of travel, transit countries and final destination), duration of stay and discuss potential adjustments to your medication schedule .Take the schedule as a Hard copy print out and Digitally in your smartphone/iPad.

**2-Understand Medication Timing:** Know the specific instructions for each medication, including whether it should be taken with or without food and any other relevant considerations.

**3-Establish a New Medication Schedule:** Once you know the time zone of your destination, your doctor will establish a new medication schedule that aligns with the local time of your visit.



**4-Consider Long-Acting Insulin:** Adjusting your time according to the travel plan is very necessary. Long acting insulins can be very helpful as it can be taken once during 24hrs as well as 72hrs and helps to maintain sugar levels constantly on the baseline.

**5-Use Technology:** Set alarms or reminders on your phone to help you remember when to take your medications in the new time zone. Also if you have a CGM device (continuous Glucose monitoring) device it is important you keep track on your graphical levels of blood sugar all the time.

**6-Monitor Blood Sugar Levels:** Check your blood sugar levels more frequently, keeping a CGM device (Continuous Glucose Monitoring) Device will be very helpful as it prevents pricking of your finger each time during travel to check for sugar levels.

**7-Be Prepared for Changes in Diet and Activity:** Be mindful of changes in diet and activity levels as travel often involves them. Adjust your medications accordingly, as these changes can impact blood sugar levels.

**8-Stay Hydrated:** Traveling can be dehydrating. Ensure you stay well-hydrated, as dehydration can affect blood sugar levels.

**9-During Emergency:** Have a plan for managing highs and lows of sugars. Know what to do in case of unexpected events, such as missed doses or changes in eating patterns, delayed flights, long transits. Make sure you have enough supplies of medication and nonperishable low glycemic foods to keep you Up all through the journey.

#### Diabetic protective Gears

- Never go barefoot, wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes and socks always. Prevent all kind of Injuries which can bring in diabetic related complications.
- Check your feet frequently, particularly after a hike or long walk.
- Consider wearing light knee-high compression stockings (20-30 mm Hg) or bring thinner socks to change into if your feet swell, especially during flights. Take a walk often even while onboard a flight.

- Wear shoes that can be loosened if needed.
- Improve blood flow in your calf muscles and decrease swelling by pointing and flexing your ankles during a flight.
- Lower the risk of blood clots by adopting these measures for foot care and comfort.
- CGM (Continuous Glucose Monitoring) Device are very helpful in preventing daily finger pricks and helps in avoiding extra strips devices as Luggage.
- Travel sharps container, carry a travel-sized sharps container for the safe disposal of used needles and lancets (if you're using a glucometer or disposable insulin syringe).
- Wear a Mask during the Journey to avoid respiratory infections such as COVID, RSV infections, H. Influenzae etc, as diabetes can invite chances for more infections.
- First Aid Kit-Include a small first aid kit with basic supplies for wound care.
- Last but not least carry Glucose Tablets/Glucose powder sachets which is a life saver during emergencies like Hypoglycemia (low sugars).



#### Preparedness for Emergencies:

Here are some Common Emergencies that diabetic individuals may face during travel and practical tips on how to handle them:

##### Hypoglycemia (Low Blood Sugar):

- Emergency Signs: Sweating, dizziness, shakiness, confusion, irritability, and fainting.
- Response: Always carry fast-acting carbohydrates such as sublingual glucose tablets, Glucose powder sachets, or fruit juice. Inform travel companions or show your medical

ID about your condition and let them know how to assist you. Regularly check blood sugar levels, especially before meals and physical activities.

#### **Hyperglycemia (High Blood Sugar):**

- Emergency Signs: Increased thirst, fatigue, frequent urination and confusion.
- Response: Ensure you have an ample supply of insulin or medications. Stay hydrated, monitor blood sugar levels regularly, and adhere to your meal plan. If hyperglycemia persists, seek medical attention promptly.

#### **Damaged Medications or Insulin Pump**

##### **Malfunction:**

- Emergency Signs: Failure or malfunction of the insulin pump.
- Response: Always carry a backup supply of insulin, syringes, and other necessary supplies. Familiarize yourself with manual injection techniques in case of pump failure.
- Emergency Signs: Running out of insulin, glucose testing strips, or other essential supplies.
- Response: Pack enough medications and supplies for the entire trip, plus extras in case of unexpected delays. Keep medications in your carry-on bag to prevent loss or damage. Research local pharmacies at your destination in case replacements are needed.

#### **Illness or Infection:**

- Emergency Signs: High sugar levels, Fever, Skin discoloration, Fatigue, Headache
- Response: Meet a local health care facility or a doctor who will help in adjusting insulin doses as recommended by your Family Doctor. Stay hydrated, monitor blood sugar frequently, and seek medical attention if your condition worsens.

#### **Injuries and Wounds:**

- Emergency Signs: Cuts, bruises, or injuries, Skin Redness, Muscle pain, Fever, Headache.
- Response: Carry a basic first aid kit with antiseptic wipes, bandages, and antibiotic ointment. Promptly clean and treat any injuries to prevent infection. Regularly inspect your feet for blisters or sores.
- Start Oral antibiotics if needed only after consulting your doctor or a Local Gp at your country of Stay.

#### **Travel Delays:**

Delays during travel are frequent and everyone must be prepared to face the same.

- Emergency Signs: Extended delays affecting meal schedules and medication timing.
- Response: Always carry extra snacks and medications to account for unexpected delays. Communicate with airline or your companions so that accommodation and diabetic

friendly meals / emergency medications can be provided specially to the required persons.

#### **Travel Insurance:**

Always handy to keep a travel insurance during any journey outside your country. You want peace of mind that any emergency medical costs for your diabetes or any other medical condition is covered. Make sure that any travel insurance covers pre-existing medical conditions like diabetes, as many don't. It's also important you ask if they cover Infections such as COVID-19, in case you may need treatment while you're away from your country.

