

# NDSS

National Diabetes Services Scheme

An Australian Government Initiative

# Travel and type 1 diabetes



NDSS Helpline 1800 637 700  
[ndss.com.au](http://ndss.com.au)

 **diabetes**  
australia

The NDSS is administered by Diabetes Australia

Whether you're planning a day trip or a journey for several weeks, changes to your exercise and eating routines as well as differences in time zones can impact your diabetes and how you manage it when you travel. But planning ahead can prevent potential problems, reduce stress and ensure your holiday is an awesome one.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice. If you have any concerns about your health, or further questions, you should contact your health professional.

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# Planning for your trip

## Travel insurance

Travel Insurance is highly recommended for everyone who travels. Especially for people living with type 1 diabetes. It's best to read the terms and conditions before booking travel insurance to make sure the accident and health cover applies to each of the following:

- » pre-existing condition (e.g. type 1 diabetes)
- » the places you will visit
- » the activities you may undertake (e.g. bungee jumping, skiing).

Some companies charge an extra fee for a person with type 1 diabetes. The loss of insulin and diabetes supplies can be treated differently by various insurers, so it's best to check this when getting insurance.





## Plan ahead

If you plan on travelling internationally, check the rules, regulations and safety information of your destination. You can do this by searching for your travel destination at the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website: [dfat.gov.au/geo/countries-economies-and-regions](https://dfat.gov.au/geo/countries-economies-and-regions). It's also a good idea to register with Smart Traveller in the event of an emergency to stay up-to-date with the latest safety and travel information: [smartraveller.gov.au](https://smartraveller.gov.au).

The Australian Government has arrangements with a range of countries providing travellers with benefits similar to Medicare if needed, but only for acute or emergency care. In this event, you would need to produce your Medicare card. For more information, call Medicare Australia on **13 20 11** or go to Services Australia's website: [servicesaustralia.gov.au/reciprocal-health-care-agreements](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/reciprocal-health-care-agreements).

## Travel vaccinations and medications

Speak to your general practitioner (GP) or a doctor at a specialist travel clinic to find out what specific vaccines (e.g., Hepatitis A) or special medicine (e.g., against Malaria) you may need. What you'll need will depend on the countries you plan to visit. Allow at least 3 months prior to your travel date as sometimes a series of injections is needed.

## Get a medical letter and prescriptions from your doctor

Make sure you see your diabetes specialist or GP four to six weeks before you travel.

### Ask your doctor for a typed letter proving your medical condition.

The letter should state that you have type 1 diabetes. It should also state:

- » your full name
- » address
- » date of birth
- » medications you take
- » insulin delivery devices (syringes, insulin pens or pumps) that you use
- » blood glucose measurement equipment that you use.

The letter should state that you must be allowed to carry these items with you at all times. You should also ask your doctor to state that you need to carry sharps such as insulin needles and lancets for finger prick checks on board the plane.

If you're on an insulin pump, make sure the letter outlines that at **no time** is your insulin pump to be removed from your body. Make several copies of this letter before you travel.

**Get extra prescriptions for any of your current medications**, including glucagon. Ask your doctor for prescriptions to purchase all the necessary medications you'll need while away. This is because finding the required medication in some countries can be tricky. If you're on a pump, always carry backup insulin pens in case your pump fails.



**Develop an action plan** for managing your diabetes and insulin dosages during the flight. You may need to adjust your insulin schedule for long flights or travelling to a different time zone. Pack extra snacks in case inflight meal service is delayed.

**Discuss meals** and foods available in the region you're travelling to.

**Develop an emergency plan if diabetes-related complications happen while travelling**, as well as a sick day action plan. This includes a list of all emergency contacts including your doctor, diabetes educator, GP and family members. Make sure your hypoglycaemia (hypo) and sick day kits are in-date and have all the supplies you need for the duration of your travel. For more information go to [ndss.com.au](https://ndss.com.au) and read or download the Living well with type 1 diabetes – what to do when you are sick and Managing hypoglycaemia fact sheets.

**Talk to your diabetes health professional about when to change your insulin pump injection site, line and battery before travelling.** It's also a good idea to discuss with your diabetes health professionals how pressure changes during the flight will affect your pump and insulin delivery and what you will need to do, including checking for air bubbles.

**Give a copy of ALL your documentation to someone at home.** This way if you need extra copies while travelling, they can be sent to you. You can also email a copy of the documents to yourself before you travel.

Have a list of hospitals or contact the embassy where you're travelling to so you know what to expect if you need to use the healthcare system there.



# Before boarding

**Have all syringes and insulin supplies clearly marked with the pharmaceutical pre-printed label.** It's recommended that people with type 1 diabetes travel with their original pharmacy labelled packaging. All prescription medications need to be carried by the person they're prescribed for. Your insulin will not be damaged if X-rayed when you pass through security checkpoints.

**Carry all of your diabetes supplies in your carry-on luggage to prevent them getting lost.** Additionally, luggage stored in cargo holds can be subjected to extreme temperature changes which may inactivate your insulin.

## While on an insulin pump

**Let the security screeners know you have diabetes,** and if you're wearing an insulin pump and a continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) or flash glucose monitoring (Flash GM) device, and that you're carrying supplies with you.

**You can continue to wear your insulin pump or CGM or Flash GM device while going through airport security systems,** such as a metal detector or hand wands, as it will not harm the device or trigger an alarm. But CGM or Flash GM devices can't be exposed to any form of x-rays. This includes luggage x-ray machines or full body x-ray scanners.

**Don't disconnect your pump from your body if requested by security.** In Australia, a visual screening of the device can be undertaken but a screening officer must not ask the person to remove the device. If required, show your medical letter proving you're a person living with type 1 diabetes and that your pump must remain connected at all times.

If travelling internationally, your insulin pump may be swabbed for explosives while still attached to your body.

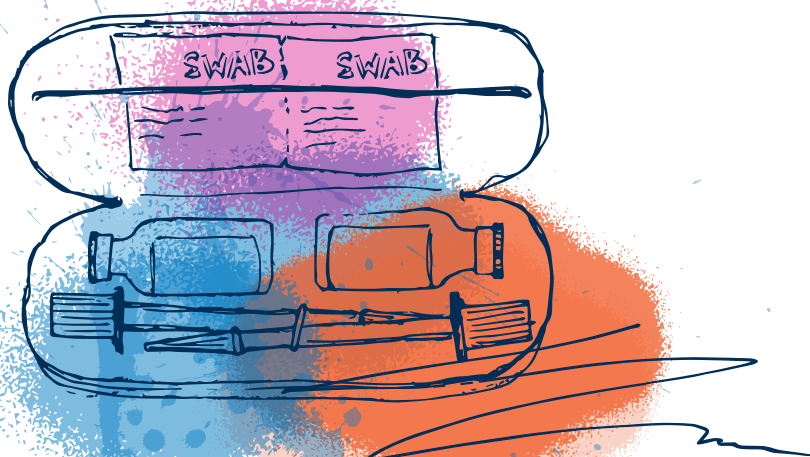
# Flying

**Keep your insulin supplies and hypo/emergency snacks close to you**, such as under the seat in front of you. This ensures you have snacks on hand in the event of a hypo or if meals are delayed.

**Leave your wristwatch or pump clock unadjusted during the flight** so you can continue to judge the timing of injections and meals during the flight according to 'Australian time' (or the time zone of place you are leaving).

**Avoid ordering the 'diabetic friendly' meal option as these are often too low in carbohydrates (carbs).** It's best to order the standard meal option and hold off from injecting insulin until your meal is in front of you. You may need to carry your own artificial sweeteners if you use them.

**Check your blood glucose levels often** to make sure you're in your target range.




# On arrival

**Adjust your wristwatch or pump clock to the time of your destination.** This may also require calculating when your next meal or injection may be. You can formulate a plan with your diabetes health professionals using your flight itinerary.

**Take care with food and drink choices, particularly in developing countries** where the risk of gastroenteritis from contaminated food and drinks is more common.

**REMEMBER:** Difference in activities, foods and routines may require adjustments to your insulin doses or pump settings.

A stylized illustration of a hand with a wristwatch. The hand is rendered in blue and black ink, with a yellow watch face and a black strap. The background is a mix of blue and orange splatters.

If you are on a pump  
On your return  
**REMEMBER** to reset  
your pump times to  
your home time zone.

# What if I have problems while I'm travelling?

With all of this planning it's unlikely that something will go wrong. But, if something happens, don't panic. The first thing to remember is medical assistance will be available.

## Replacing lost supplies

Remember to keep insulin, delivery devices (pens/syringes) and monitoring equipment on you at all times when you're in transit.

After you've gone through security, it's a good idea to split your diabetes supplies between your bags or give some supplies to your travel partner if you're not travelling alone. If you happen to lose your luggage or diabetes supplies during transit, it's best to attend a major hospital's emergency room. The hospital should be able to give you enough diabetes supplies for the rest of your trip.

You may also wish to contact the diabetes organisation in the country in which you are travelling (if applicable) to find out how to get supplies in their country. You can find contact details for the local organisation in advance by visiting the International Diabetes Federation's website: [idf.org](https://idf.org)

## Emergency assistance

In an unlikely event where you're admitted to hospital, you should reach out to your emergency contacts outlined in your emergency plan, and seek advice from your travel insurer. Most costs can be recovered through health benefits or through your own medical insurance when you get home.

# Checklist

The following is a printable checklist to assist with your travel plans. Tick them off before you head off on your travels.

✓	Item	Description
	NDSS Card	The card, along with your doctor's letter, provides proof that you're a person living with diabetes. To check your details or get a digital copy of your NDSS card, go to <a href="https://ndss.com.au">ndss.com.au</a> and sign in to <a href="#">My NDSS</a> .
	Travel insurance papers	Make sure your accident and health cover applies to pre-existing conditions, the places you'll visit and the activities you plan to do.
	Insulin, syringes and pens	Make sure you pack short- and long-acting insulin when travelling, even if you're on an insulin pump. It's recommended that you take more than you'll need for the trip. Check the availability of the insulin you use in the countries you plan to visit. The types of insulin in Australia may have a different name and colour code overseas. Therefore it's best to get all the insulin you need before you leave.
	Glucagon emergency kit	Carry it in its original, pharmaceutical labelled packaging.
	Emergency prescriptions	This will help you get more diabetes supplies, and reassure security officers that the medications are your own.
	Doctor's letter	Make sure the letter is typed. Keep several copies with your travel documents and present it at security checkpoints if necessary. The letter should outline your medical condition, the prescription medications you're taking and if you're on an insulin pump.
	Batteries	Take spare batteries for your blood glucose meter and insulin pump (if used).

✓	Item	Description
	Ketone monitoring strips	Make sure the strips are in-date before departure.
	Blood glucose monitoring strips	Always pack more than you think you'll need. Check the availability of blood glucose monitoring strips in the countries you plan to visit.
	Finger pricker(s)	Take a spare if you have one available.
	CGM or Flash GM devices	Depending on how long you plan to travel, you may need to bring extra CGM or Flash GM supplies.
	Lancets and needles	Pack more than you plan to use for your trip.
	Medical alert bracelet	Choose one with international medical symbol, specifying type 1 diabetes.
	Medicare card	The Australian government has arrangements with some countries providing benefits similar to Medicare if needed. Remember to take your Medicare card with you while travelling. To see which countries provide benefits, call Medicare Australia on <b>13 20 11</b> or go to their website: <a href="https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/reciprocal-health-care-agreements">servicesaustralia.gov.au/reciprocal-health-care-agreements</a> .
	Cool pack/ Frio pack*	If your travels involve extreme heat it may be necessary to pack your insulin in a cool pack to keep it protected from the heat.
	Sharps disposal container	Dispose of your discarded sharps safely while you are travelling.
	Fast-acting carbs	This may include glucose tablets, lollies/ confectionery, non-diet soft drinks to relieve hypo symptoms. Check fluid restrictions if travelling by plane.
	Slow-acting carbs	This may include dry biscuits, muesli bars to serve as snacks if meals are delayed. If travelling overseas, check if there are limits or restriction to bringing food or drinks into the country you are visiting.

\* Frio packs are available online at the Diabetes Shop: [diabetesshop.com](https://diabetesshop.com).  
For more information call the NDSS Helpline **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes health professional.

# Extra item checklist

## for people using an insulin pump

✓	Item	Description
	Loan insulin pump	Most companies that make insulin pumps will offer you a loan pump during your times of overseas travel. This is in case your current pump stops working. You can go to your pump manufacturer's website to download the required form. Pump companies can provide a list of their offices in the countries you are travelling to.
	Syringes and pens	In case of insulin pump failure, you may need to use syringes for temporary short-acting insulin. If you're off your pump for more than 24 hours, you'll need to use long-acting insulin. It's recommended you take 2 or 3 disposable pens for short- and long-acting insulin.
	Insulin pump consumables	This includes lines, alcohol wipes, and inserters and five cent piece for changing the battery.



## Further resources

For more information about diabetes and travel:

[\*\*ndss.com.au/travel\*\*](http://ndss.com.au/travel).

Medicare Australia Website:

[\*\*medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/migrants/travelling/index.jsp\*\*](http://medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/migrants/travelling/index.jsp).

Smart Traveller Website:

[\*\*smartraveller.gov.au\*\*](http://smartraveller.gov.au).

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

[\*\*dfat.gov.au/geo/countries-economies-and-regions\*\*](http://dfat.gov.au/geo/countries-economies-and-regions).

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