



Traveling with Diabetes

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Diabetes shouldn't get in the way of living the life you want to live, and traveling is no exception. There are some important tips and tricks that can help keep you safe while traveling and ensure that you are able to enjoy your journey.

Planning Ahead

This is really the biggest piece, and although you may not be someone who enjoys planning, with diabetes in the mix, the extra planning can really make a big difference. How far you are traveling can also play into your preparation, as well as how close you will be to medical facility or medical personnel if you need assistance. For example, when traveling to Central America in nursing school, the hospitals were far away, but I was always with other medical professionals.

Here are some things that I try to do ahead of my travels

Prescriptions + Supplies

- Two weeks ahead, if I can, I try to make sure I don't need pump supplies because they can take some time to arrive
- One to two weeks ahead I like to make sure I don't need to refill insulin, CGMs, etc.
- If you wear an insulin pump, it is a good idea to travel with back-up basal insulin, such as an insulin pen or vial of long-acting insulin, in the event your insulin pump fails on your travels.

Packing

- Almost all my diabetes supplies stay in my carry-on for air travel
 - Some supplies are temperature sensitive, especially test strips
- If they fit, I keep them all in one reusable zip lock bag so that if I need to check my carry-on, I can easily pull it out to keep with me in the cabin of the plane (there are also some really cute diabetes bags out there!)
- Always, always pack more than you think you will need – extra infusion sets, syringes, pen needles, test strips, etc.

Security

- **Pat-downs** – Most diabetes device manufacturers are going to recommend you get a hand pat-down and avoid bringing the device through body and baggage scanners.
 - Metal detectors are usually fine, but if the device is made of metal, like the T:Slim pump, it will alarm.
 - Many people with diabetes report sending insulin pumps and receivers through both body and baggage scanners, and I can confirm I have also taken my devices through both scanners without issue.
- **Hand swipes** – if your pump is visible, sometimes TSA will have you handle the device, then swipe your hand with a little swab and put it into a machine. It's testing for explosive materials, but it's important to know there are a couple things that can prompt a false positive including sunscreen and hand sanitizer.

- If you're wearing a pump that's visible, try to avoid using hand sanitizer or sunscreen right before going through security, or make sure your hands are clean.

Documents

- If you're traveling internationally, I would highly recommend getting a letter from your healthcare team that states you have diabetes, and you need to travel with whatever supplies you need with you for your trip.
 - Although diabetes devices are becoming more mainstream (Thank you, Nick Jonas), not everyone is aware of what diabetes devices are and what items are needed for people with diabetes.
 - Having a list of the supplies you need, especially if you need things like juice boxes or other liquids, can be helpful.
 - Your diabetes device company should have an example letter if you or your healthcare team needs assistance.

Sharing My Experiences

I feel very fortunate as someone who has traveled to Central America, South America, Europe, and all over North America. I have had a few very stressful encounters with security, including an experience in Paris where they would not let me through security without a document that stated I have diabetes (I was saved by a Medical Alert card I happened to have in my wallet – good job 16-year-old me!). I've also had to throw out supplies at the airport. This was luckily on my way home, which is still unfortunate, but I didn't want to argue with the security staff in Cali, Colombia...

I also had the pleasure of experiencing a positive test for explosive materials with the hand swab on my insulin pump when I was traveling alone with my two children during the pandemic; of course, that's when these types of things happen. I used to plan extra time for security because I wanted to wear my pump and almost always had pat-downs. Then I heard from a friend that they put their pump in their carry-on so they can avoid the extra pat-downs and hand swabs. I've been doing that ever since, and it's been totally fine!

If you're going out of the country, traveling for an extended time, or are just worried about trying this and want to be extra cautious and do the hand pat-down – go for it!! There is no shame in doing what you need to do for yourself on your travel day. Maybe when you're on your way home, back to your hoard of diabetes supplies (we are all sort of hoarders with diabetes, aren't we?), you can try the other method to see if things go smoothly.

Happy travels, friends!