



Transition Support Service

Travelling with a chronic health condition/disability for young people

Things to do before you travel

Introduction

Chronic health conditions and disabilities can be difficult to manage when away from home, and can impact on your travel and holiday experience. The important thing to remember is that it doesn't mean you can't make travel plans; you just have to be realistic and prepared to ensure you can access what you need when you need it regardless of where you are in the world.

Don't assume that medical availability and treatment will be the same as you experience at home — it can be very different! If you have a chronic health condition or disability, putting a few things in place before you travel could make your trip much more enjoyable.

Talk to your doctor

It's important to book an appointment with your doctor (GP or specialist) and have a chat about your travel plans. They can provide information about how your health condition/disability might affect you on your trip and help develop a plan for managing your condition when travelling.

Ask your doctor about getting a 'Physicians Letter'. This will:

- Allow you to carry certain medications and equipment, particularly through customs and security.
- Outline your medical condition/s, prescribed medications and dosages and any equipment you require.
- Be useful if you need to see a doctor or visit a hospital in the country you are travelling in at short notice.

Your doctor can also help you develop an emergency plan for your trip, just in case you need this.

Getting your medications on the road

If you are on medication/s, think about how you will take them with you and whether you can. Consider these questions in relation to the place/s you are travelling to:

- Do I have enough medication for the duration of my trip?
- Do I know how and where to access my medication if needed?
- Will my medication be available?
- Who can I contact for more if I run out?

- Who do I contact if I lose my medication and need it urgently?
- Will it cost any more to what I'm used to paying for my medication/s?

Accessing medications can be very different in each place you go to, and some medications may not be accessible, so remember to do some research before you leave. A great place to start finding out this information is through your healthcare team or by doing some research online about the medical services available in the places you're planning to visit.

Sometimes you may not be able to fill your prescription from your doctor overseas or some medications may not be available where you're going, so it is important to carry an adequate supply of your medication for the entire trip plus some extra in case of delays.

The same principle applies to any special equipment needs that you may have in managing your health.

Packing and taking your medications with you

If you're taking your medications with you on your trip, think about some of the practical aspects such as fitting it in your luggage, clearing it with airport security/customs and any policies on bringing specific medications into the place you're going to (see airport section for more information). Ask yourself the following questions so you're planned and ready for your trip.

Does my medication need to be kept in the fridge?

If it does be sure the accommodation you book for your trip has access to one that is safe.

General travel tips

Regardless of having a health condition or not, there are general things that everyone needs to think about before they travel:

- Immunisations — are they up-to-date? Do I need extra because of where I'm going?

Some vaccines require more than one dose, so it is important to start the course well in advance of travel. Check with your GP or specialist about this.

- Let family or friends know where I'm going to and where I'm staying, should anything happen.
- Plan your itinerary.
- Book all accommodation and flights/methods of travel.
- Have access to money or financial support should I need it on my trip.
- Organise time off work or school.

For information on destination alert levels in regards to health risks, make sure you check:
<http://smartraveller.gov.au/countries/Pages/default.aspx>

Is my medication okay to be out of the fridge during my flight or travel time?

If your medication needs to stay cool at a certain temperature consider packing it with ice packs inside a cooler bag and check whether this is okay with both your health care team and the airline if you're flying.

How much do I need to take?

Plan with your health care team about how much of your medication you will need with you on your trip including an extra emergency supply should you need it. Remember that your medication needs might vary depending on the type of activities you'll be participating in on your trip.

Will my medications/equipment be difficult to pack?

Remember if you're taking your medication with you, you have to be able to pack and carry it to every place you stay at along the way. If possible, try and remove some excess packaging that comes with your medication.

Can I fit my medications into my luggage and will it be safe there?

Just because you leave your medications in your hotel or accommodation, doesn't necessarily mean it will be safe there. Like anything valuable, make sure you will have a safe place to put it wherever you stay.

Medical alert bracelet or medical identification

Wearing a medical alert bracelet or having some form of medical identification on you is important while you're travelling.

Your medical alert could be a life saver in emergency situations, especially in places you've never been to before and where nobody knows who you are. It may also take a while for your family to be contacted in an emergency. If you don't have one, it may be a good time to get one before you travel and this can be organised through your healthcare team.

Iphones also come with the automatic 'Health' app loaded onto the phone. In the app there is a Medical ID section, which acts like a medical alert. By filling in this section of the app, it provides information about your health that may be important in an emergency. This information can be accessed from the emergency dialler button without unlocking your phone. For other android devices, a similar app can be downloaded which has the same features.

Air Travel

Here are some things to think about if you're travelling by plane:

Mobility

Do you need a wheelchair or a seat near the toilet when travelling?

Medications

Make sure these are in your hand luggage and you have spoken to your pharmacist about how to keep these cool if required.

Fluid Intake

Keeping up your fluids and increasing your intake will help with the dehydrating effects of low cabin air humidity.

Passenger Medical Information Form (MEDIF)

These provide information about requirements for travellers with medical conditions. Airlines have these forms available from travel agents.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance (depending on the type of coverage you choose), enables you to gain assistance if something goes wrong on your trip. It can be a bit more difficult or expensive to get travel insurance with a pre-existing medical condition/disability, however it is very important to have this in place before you travel. If you can't afford travel insurance, you can't afford to travel — this rule should apply to everyone.

Talk to your family or friends as they may have previously taken out insurance with a particular company and do shop around. Understand your condition/disability and do your research to make sure you have the right cover.

Factors affecting your decision about which travel insurance to choose, could include:

- Travel location
- Budget
- The nature of your health condition/disability
- If you have been unwell or have had recent hospitalisations
- Cover for 'retrievals' if you are in an out of the way place and need to get to a large hospital.

There are some conditions that insurers will not cover. This does not mean you cannot take out travel insurance. It simply means that any claim arising from, or related to that condition, will not be covered. Most insurers have a list of pre-existing medical conditions that are covered for free automatically. If your condition is not listed, you may be covered for an additional fee and might require an assessment depending on the seriousness of your condition.

Reading the fine print is very important and allow plenty of time to find the right travel insurance for you. There are a number of different companies each with their own policies, regulations and inclusions/exclusions.

When choosing a travel insurance policy be sure to find out:

- The cost of the premium and the excess
- What is included and what is excluded
- The dollar limits for claims on individual items and as a whole
- What proof you need to make a claim
- How to contact your insurer if you are overseas
- What paperwork you need to take with you on your holiday.

<http://smartraveller.gov.au/guide/all-travellers/insurance/pages/choice-travel-insurance-buying-guide.aspx>

Airports

Airports can be tricky places to navigate, but if you have a chronic health condition/disability, it's important to be prepared.

If you require needles or any other potentially dangerous equipment you will need to declare it when you check in and at the screening point.

If you require oxygen or have special seating needs you will need to arrange this with the airline at the time of booking. Any forms of documentation or identification that confirms your medical condition/disability and the need for your medication or equipment should be with you (i.e. your 'physician's letter' or your medical alert bracelet/identification).

If you require support with your disability at the airport, do let the airline know of your requirements or assistance needs (including wheelchair assistance) when you make your travel booking, as each airline is different. A great place to start is visiting the airline's website for more information and contacting them directly. If you are travelling from Melbourne Airport, you could access assistance (including help getting to your departure lounge) from the Travellers' Information Service located on the ground floor Arrivals hall in the International terminal (T2) or the Domestic terminal (T1).

Security for medications or medical devices

- Anything used to keep your medications cool (ice packs, freezer packs etc.) that are not solid at the security checkpoint are subject to the same screening as other medically necessary liquids. Other supplies like IV bags, syringes and pumps undergo X-ray screening.
- Medications are required to be carried in original containers with the pharmacy printed label attached to it. For liquids medications that are over the 100ml limit in hand luggage, a doctors supporting letter is required.
- Any medical device attached to your body and where it is on your body needs to be known to the TSA officer before screening begins. This is where any documentation describing your condition is required. Any external medical device is required to go through X-ray screening.

More information

For more information about travelling with medications and medical devices, head to: <http://www.tga.gov.au/travelling-medicines-and-medical-devices>

Resources

www.traveldoctor.com.au

<http://smartraveller.gov.au/>

<https://www.tsa.gov/travel>

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