

# Chapter H

**Holidays-how to manage diabetes safely**

## H: Holidays-how to manage diabetes safely

Holidays can affect your diabetes. It is best to discuss with your diabetes team before going away particularly if you are travelling far away. Plan well in advance and get supplies ready a week or two before. Ask for a travel letter from clinic as this may be required at the airport.

### 1. Temperature (see also exercise below)

**Hot Temperature:** Insulin needs to be kept out of direct sunlight, this is particularly important with pumps, so put them under a towel or clothing when in the sun. Use a cool bag/ Frio bag to carry insulin. Keep spare insulin in a fridge if you have access to one. When you return from holiday start with new insulin that has not been away with you.

**Cold temperature:** Insulin does not tolerate being frozen, so keep it somewhere cool. Wear pumps under clothing and protected from freezing temperatures if you are skiing or walking outdoors in cold temperatures.

### 2. Exercise

Many holidays involve more exercise, swimming, walking etc. More frequent glucose checking will be needed to see the effect of the extra activity. Here are some ideas:

- If on a pump, use an exercise target setting
- If on injections, reduce your long acting insulin (Levemir, Tresiba) by 10-20% on the day you leave the UK.
- Food insulin: keep your usual ratio to start with but this may need reducing. E.g. 1: 10 to 1:15.
- You may be able to have extra snacks without insulin if you are exercising a lot.



### 3. Time zones

Local flights to mainland Europe require no change to insulin. However if more than 3-4 hours time change requires planning and should be discussed with the diabetes team. Remember to change the time on any devices, so that the right amount of insulin is delivered at the right time.

#### 4. Alcohol

- If you want to drink alcohol it is best to combine it with food.
- If you are drinking a lot you are at risk of hypos, remember the symptoms of hypo and being drunk can be the same.
- Make sure your friends know what to do and how to treat a hypo.
- Carry some ID saying you have diabetes.

#### 5. Spare equipment

Make sure you have enough insulin, needles and glucose checking kit. If on a pump you must have emergency pens and insulin in case the pump fails. You may need to go on injections until the pump can be replaced. You will need to know your basal rate and bolus ratios in case this happens.

Do not put it all in your main luggage as it will be too cold in the luggage hold of the plane and it may get lost. Split it up into different hand luggage. Insulin should always go in hand luggage.

If on a pump, take the pump manufacturers emergency contact number in case it breaks. They may be able to send a new one to your holiday destination. If not, use injections until you return to the UK.

#### 6. Extreme sports

You must inform companies providing extreme sports that you have diabetes. Check your blood glucose before to make sure you are not low. Adrenalin or nervousness can cause high or low glucose levels. Do not correct a high glucose level in case it is due to adrenalin. If the activity requires a lot of physical activity make sure you have some extra glucose available. You may need glucose gel sachets or DextroGel for water based activities. It is your responsibility to make sure you are safe.

#### 7. Insurance

Make sure you have health insurance covering your diabetes. Admission to hospital can be very expensive.

Your insulin pump should already be on home insurance - check whether this is covered if stolen on holiday, or if it needs to be listed on travel insurance.

**Most importantly have a good holiday!!**