

Advice for Travellers with Asthma



Relaxing and having fun while you are on holiday is key to having a good time while you are away. If you have asthma you don't need to change your travel plans, but good preparation is essential as seasonal changes, climate, terrain, and air quality can all be triggers for people with asthma.

You can't predict everything but forward thinking is important for planning a trouble free holiday.

Before you go:

Speak to your doctor or nurse at least 6-8 weeks before you travel to discuss your specific travel health requirements, including the vaccines you may need for travelling abroad.

Make sure that you book an appointment with the doctor or nurse at your local asthma clinic, for a thorough review before you travel. Draw up a written, personal action plan with your doctor or asthma nurse so that even if your asthma is affected, it need not ruin your time away.

- Talk to your doctor about taking a rescue steroid course with you as part of your management plan
- Find out how you can get medical help (local ambulance or doctor) at your holiday destination.
- Take out adequate travel insurance and check that it will cover your asthma.

Ask your doctor or nurse for a letter explaining your condition and take a copy of your prescription with you.

Immunisations:

Tell your doctor if you have recently received a course of high dose oral steroids and check that you are currently up to date with your routine vaccinations including influenza and pneumococcal immunisation.

Travelling with medication:

Carry your medication in your hand luggage in case your checked in luggage goes missing. You may have to check airline security requirements if taking liquids or needles/syringes on board an aircraft.

- Take a letter with you from your doctor giving the name of the medicine (both the brand name and generic name) and what it is used for. This may help when passing through customs or if you need to seek medical attention abroad.
- Ensure that all medicines are kept in their original packaging and place them in a clear plastic bag in your hand luggage. The prescription label and contact pharmacy details should be clearly shown on all medicines taken onboard an aircraft.

- When checking in, and at the security check, inform staff of your need to carry your asthma medicines with you in your hand luggage.
- Make sure that you take enough inhalers and tablets to last you for the whole holiday plus a few extra days.
- Include spare inhalers in your luggage (in case of loss, damage or theft). Temperatures in an aircraft hold may fall well below freezing so check with your doctor or pharmacist that your medication will not be affected by freezing.

If you need further information or advice about travelling with medication talk to your healthcare provider.

Travel Insurance:

It is important that you take out adequate travel insurance. Check that your policy will cover asthma, including the cost of unexpected treatments while you are away.

If you are travelling in Europe, make sure you have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC entitles you to reduced cost, sometimes free, medical treatment in most European countries. Please note, you should still always take out private health insurance, as an EHIC will not necessarily cover all the costs of your treatment and will not cover the cost of being flown back to the UK.

EHICs are free through the NHS. To apply for or renew yours, go to www.nhs.uk/healthcareabroad, call 0845 606 2030 or get an application pack from some Post Offices.

Exercise on holiday:

You should be able to take part in any type of activity or exercise, according to your own level of fitness, as long as your asthma is under control.

- Remember that when you are on holiday your levels of exertion may be increased by climate change, air quality and terrain.
- Swimming is unlikely to trigger asthma symptoms however for some people the chemicals used in the swimming pool may be a trigger.
- Make sure that you always have your reliever inhaler with you when ever you exercise.

Taking part in adventure sports:

Some sports and activities, for example, scuba-diving, climbing, hiking or skiing at high altitudes or in cold weather, can cause problems for some people with asthma.

Speak to your doctor or asthma nurse if you are thinking about doing any of the following activities.

- **Scuba-diving** - always consult your doctor if you plan to scuba dive. If you have asthma you may have greater problems when scuba-diving because of the triggers to which you are exposed when you dive (cold air, exercise, stress, emotion). Further information is available from the British Sub-Aqua Club on their website www.bsac.com

- **High Altitudes** - the mountain environment contains several triggers for people with asthma (cold, dry air and exercise). Always consult your doctor before planning a trip. Medical advice on mountaineering at high altitudes is available from the British Mountaineering Council <http://www.thebmc.co.uk/>
- **Skiing** - involves many of the same asthma triggers as mountaineering. Cross-country skiing is thought to be a stronger trigger for asthma than downhill skiing or mountaineering. People with well-controlled asthma should be able to ski safely. You should make sure that your asthma is well controlled before you go. Always take your medicines with you when you ski and discuss your trip with your doctor in advance.
- **Parachute jumping** - always consult your doctor before planning a parachute jump or skydive. Medical advice on skydiving and parachuting is available from the British Parachute Association. As a general rule you can parachute jump or skydive if:
 - your asthma is completely controlled
 - cold air does not trigger your asthma
 - exercise does not trigger your asthma

Specialist advice on every aspect of asthma is available from Asthma UK on their website www.asthma.org.uk or by calling their advice line on 0800 1216249

This leaflet has been prepared by Sanofi Pasteur MSD to provide general information relating to healthy travel. It is not meant as an alternative to individual advice and should be used in conjunction with advice provided by a health care professional.