

Fact Sheet – Air Travel and Diabetes

1. Am I allowed to bring my diabetes supplies with me on the plane?

Yes. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) specifically states that passengers are permitted to board airplanes with insulin, syringes, insulin pumps, liquids “includ[ing] “water, juice, or liquid nutrition,” and “all diabetes related medication, equipment, and supplies.”

2. What are some general tips as I prepare to travel?

- Arrive at the airport 2-3 hours prior to flight
- Review TSA’s website for travel updates at www.tsa.gov
- Visit our page at www.diabetes.org/airportsecurity
- Whenever possible, bring prescription labels for medication and medical devices (while not required by TSA, making them available will make the security process go more quickly)
- Pack medications in a separate clear, sealable bag. Bags that are placed in your carry-on luggage need to be removed and separated from your other belongings for screening.
- Keep a quick-acting source of glucose to treat low blood glucose as well as an easy-to-carry snack such as a nutrition bar
- Carry or wear medical identification and carry contact information for your physician
- Pack extra supplies
- Be patient with lines, delays, and new screening procedures

3. Can I speak to anyone at TSA before I travel?

Yes. TSA recently launched TSA Cares, a new helpline number designed to assist travelers with disabilities and medical conditions. Travelers may call TSA Cares toll free at 1-855-787-2227 prior to traveling with questions about screening policies, procedures and what to expect at the security checkpoint. TSA Cares will serve as an additional, dedicated resource specifically for passengers with disabilities, medical conditions or other circumstances or their loved ones who want to prepare for the screening process prior to flying. The hours of operation for the TSA Cares helpline are Monday through Friday 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST, excluding federal holidays. Travelers who are deaf or hard of hearing can use a relay service to contact TSA Cares or can e-mail TSA-ContactCenter@dhs.gov.

4. Is there a discreet way I can let TSA know about my diabetes?

Yes. TSA has created an optional disability notification card that you can hand to Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) to inform them in a discreet manner that you have a disability, medical condition, or medical device that may affect security screening. It does not exempt you from screening, but can facilitate communication with TSOs. It is available at www.tsa.gov/assets/pdf/disability_notification_cards.pdf and included at the end of this fact sheet.

5. How do the new full-body scanners and pat-downs impact me?

Currently, both traditional metal detectors and Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) scanners are in use at most airports and you may be directed to either one by an officer. If AIT is available, you can request to use it instead of a metal detector. Some AIT scanners now have software eliminating passenger-specific images, so that the only images created are of a generic outline of a person like a cookie-cutter. If you choose a full pat-down or if you are subjected to additional screening because you alarm a metal detector, you have a right to have this screening done in private and with a witness of your choice. For more information on these screening procedures, see www.tsa.gov/approach/tech/ait/index.shtm and http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/pat_downs.shtm.

If you use an insulin pump and/or continuous blood glucose monitor (CGM), you also have a choice as to whether to wear them through the scanner or during a pat-down or to remove them and request a visual inspection—which may include swabbing for explosives—of the devices. (If you have questions about the safety of wearing your devices through scanners, contact the manufacturer.) If you choose to go through a conventional metal detector and your device or any other object alarms, you will be subject to a full pat-down.

If you go through an AIT scanner and the image shows an irregularity, the type of additional screening you receive will depend on how many irregularities appear and where they are located on your body. Generally, you will receive a pat-down only on or near the area in which an irregularity was seen. For example, if you wear a pump on your right side, only that area should be examined.

If you believe that you have been treated unfairly on account of your diabetes, please contact 1-800-DIABETES and ask how you can speak with a legal advocate.

6. Are there additional screening procedures for individuals who use pumps and continuous blood glucose monitors?

At this time, TSA has not provided any consumer information regarding additional screening for insulin pump wearers or users of CGMs. TSA states: “If you are concerned or uncomfortable about going through the walk-through metal detector with your insulin pump, notify the Security Officer that you are wearing an insulin pump and would like a full-body pat-down and a visual inspection of your pump instead. Advise the Security Officer that the insulin pump cannot be removed because it is inserted with a catheter (needle) under the skin.” *Hidden Disabilities: Travelers with Disabilities and Medical Conditions*, www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1374.shtm#3.

The Association sometimes receives reports from travelers who are subject to overly intrusive screening of their insulin pumps and CGMs. While TSA does thoroughly examine these devices, which may include swabbing the devices and your hands for explosives, you should not be singled out for more intrusive screening just on the basis of using medically necessary devices. TSOs should never tell you to take off your devices or tell you that you should keep them on—it is your choice.

7. Can I request a visual inspection of my diabetes supplies?

Yes. You have the option of requesting a visual inspection of your insulin and other diabetes supplies rather than putting them through the X-ray. This inspection may include swabbing for explosives. Keep in mind that you must request a visual inspection before the screening process begins otherwise your

supplies will undergo X-ray inspection. You should separate your supplies from your other property in a pouch or bag.

To prevent contamination or damage to medication and associated supplies and/or fragile medical materials, you should be asked at the security checkpoint to display, handle, and repack your own supplies during the visual inspection process. Any medication and/or associated supplies that cannot be cleared visually must be submitted for X-ray screening. If you refuse, you might not be permitted to carry your medications and related supplies into the sterile area.

8. What are some examples of items that are permitted through security?

- Insulin and insulin loaded dispensing products (vials or box of individual vials, jet injectors, biojectors, epipens, infusers, and preloaded syringes)
- Unlimited number of unused syringes when accompanied by insulin or other injectable medication
- Lancets, blood glucose meters, blood glucose meter test strips, alcohol swabs, meter-testing solutions
- Insulin pump and insulin pump supplies (cleaning agents, batteries, plastic tubing, infusion kit, catheter, and needle)—insulin pumps and supplies must be accompanied by insulin
- Glucagon emergency kit
- Urine ketone test strips
- Unlimited number of used syringes when transported in Sharps disposal container or other similar hard-surface container
- Sharps disposal containers/similar hard-surface disposal container for storing used syringes and test strips
- Liquids (to include water, juice, or liquid nutrition) or gels
- Continuous blood glucose monitors
- All diabetes related medication, equipment, and supplies

9. What if my insulin, liquids, and gels are more than 3.4 ounces?

Despite the general rule prohibiting passengers from bringing most liquids and gels through security, people with diabetes may take their insulin, other medications such as Smylin, Byetta, and Glucagon, and other liquids and gels, including juice and cake gel, through TSA checkpoints, even if they are in containers greater than 3.4 ounces. Although TSA does allow multiple containers of liquid or gel to treat hypoglycemia, as a practical matter you may want to consider alternative forms of carbohydrates, including glucose tablets, hard candy, or raisins.

All medical liquids in containers greater than 3.4 ounces must be removed from your carry-on luggage and declared to TSOs. They should not be placed in the quart-sized zip-top bag used for non-medical liquids.

Under normal conditions, insulin can safely pass through X-ray machines at airport terminals. If you have concerns about X-rays, you can request hand inspection. Insulin never should be placed in checked baggage. It could be affected by severe changes in pressure and temperature. Inspect your insulin before injecting each dose. If you notice anything unusual about the appearance of your insulin or you notice that your insulin needs are changing, call your doctor.

10. Do I need to have my prescription with me?

While TSA does not require you to have your prescription with you, it may expedite the screening process. TSA states “It is recommended (not required) that passengers bring along any supporting documentation (ID cards, letter from doctor, etc.) regarding their medication needs. It is recommended, not required, that the label on prescription medications match the passengers boarding pass.” *Changes in Allowances for Persons with Disabilities at Airport Security*, www.tsa.gov/assets/pdf/special_needs_memo.pdf.

11. What should I do if I experience hypoglycemia during screening?

You should immediately inform TSOs if you are experiencing low blood sugar and are in need of medical assistance.

12. What can I do if I think I am not being treated fairly?

If you have an immediate problem while being screened, you should ask for a supervisor. If the supervisor is not able to resolve the situation, you should ask for the TSA’s **Customer Service Manager** for that airport. You can also call the TSA Contact Center at 1-866-289-9673.

After your trip concludes, you may also want to make a complaint. If you believe you have been subject to unfair treatment because of your diabetes, please call us at 1-800-DIABETES to find out how you can speak with a legal advocate. Complaints about discriminatory treatment by TSA personnel can be directed to TSA’s Disability and Multicultural Division.

You should email your complaint to at the Disability and Multicultural Division at TSA.ODPO@tsa.dhs.gov.

TSA also accepts complaints by mail, although there may be a delay of 4 weeks because of security:

Transportation Security Administration
Disability and Multicultural Division
601 S. 12th Street
Arlington, VA 20598

If you think you have experienced discriminatory treatment by air carrier personnel (pilots, flight attendants, gate agents or check-in counter personnel), you should contact your air carrier and you may also make a complaint with the Department of Transportation’s Aviation Consumer Protection Division (ACPD). You may call the ACPD at 1-202-366-2220 or see its informational page at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/problems.htm>. More information on where travelers may file complaints for travel service problems is available here: <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/DiscrimComplaintsContacts.htm>.

13. Where can I find more information?

The TSA website provides extensive guidance on traveling with diabetes, including:

- *November 22, 2010 TSA Letter to Members of the Disability Community:*
www.diabetes.org/assets/pdfs/know-your-rights/public-accommodations/tsa-letter-on-screening-2010.pdf

- *Hidden Disabilities: Travelers with Disabilities and Medical Conditions*
www.tsa.gov/assets/pdf/special_needs_memo.pdf
- *Changes in Allowances for Persons with Disabilities at Airport Security*
www.tsa.gov/assets/pdf/special_needs_memo.pdf
- *Travelers with Disabilities and Medical Conditions*
www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/index.shtm
- *Civil Rights for Travelers:* www.tsa.gov/what_we_do/civilrights/travelers.shtm

The Association also has more information on travel in general, not just security issues:

- *When You Travel:* www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/medication/when-you-travel.html
- *The Diabetes Travel Guide, 2nd Edition*, available from our Bookstore at <http://store.diabetes.org> or by calling 1-800-232-6733.

Important Note: This fact sheet describing the legal rights of individuals with diabetes is for your general information and review only, and is not to be construed as a substitute for the advice of legal counsel.

Notification Card

I have the following health condition, disability or medical device that may affect my screening:

(optional)

I understand that presenting this card does not exempt me from screening.