

Traveling with Medication

Summary

Travelers who anticipate using prescription and non-prescription medications while abroad should be aware of a few simple guidelines.

Description

Being prepared

- Travelers are advised in general to bring along an ample supply of necessary medications, as well as a copy of their prescription.
- Carry a letter from your physician explaining your condition, what medications you take and the dosages. Keep your doctor's name, address and telephone number with you, as well as similar information about your regular pharmacist. Keep a list of your food and drug allergies and a description of the reaction, along with a list of your medical conditions.
- Because brand names vary from country to country, travelers should know the generic names of each form of medication.

Know your destination

Consult UnitedHealthcare Global to find out the following information about pharmacies and medications in your destination country:

- What is the quality and availability of international medications?
- Are there 24-hour pharmacies?
- Will pharmacies fill foreign prescriptions?
- Are there any restrictions on the medications I am allowed to bring or have with me? (If you are carrying a narcotic-based prescription drug or syringes, it is a good idea to also carry a letter from your physician stating why you need the drugs and/or supplies in question.)

Packing medications

- Keep your medications with you when you travel. Do not pack them in baggage that will be checked as they may be lost or delayed in getting to you.
- Carry your prescription medicines in their original containers, not in store-bought pill boxes. Unlabeled containers could raise suspicions and lead to problems.
- If traveling by car or bus, do not store medications in the trunk or storage compartments, as these are not temperature controlled.
- If your medication needs to remain at a specific temperature to maintain its efficacy, never let your medication directly touch ice packs and make sure the appropriate temperature can be maintained during the whole trip including potential delays. Do not put these medications in checked baggage on an airline as they may freeze.

Medicating across time zones

- If you are crossing several time zones and are on a fixed dosage schedule (for example, for insulin injections), you may have to make dosing adjustments to avoid medication lag.
- If you are afraid you will get confused or if you have to keep track of more than one medication, it may help to have an extra wristwatch set on home time.

Prepare for climate changes

- Be aware that a change in climate may bring on untoward drug side effects. In hot climates, for example, diuretics may cause some dizziness at first, but such side effects are usually fleeting. Also, antihistamines, cold preparations, and tranquilizers can decrease your ability to perspire.
- In some climates or weather conditions, you may need to carry your medicine in an insulated bag.

Taking medication safely

In some countries travelers are advised to avoid tap water; if this is the case, drink bottled water with medications. If you need to take your medication with food, consider bringing along your own snacks, particularly if you are traveling in remote areas or may be away from accommodations for several hours.

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