

Travelling Abroad

Before you go

Always take a full supply of your epilepsy medication, especially when you travel abroad. Keep the drugs in their original containers. If you're flying, keep some of your medication in your hand luggage, in case your suitcase goes missing or is delayed. You should also carry a letter from your doctor stating the name and the dose of your medication, and a prescription in case of emergencies.

Flying and jet lag

Flying itself is not known to trigger seizures. However, it is important to be aware of other factors that could affect you. These include missing sleep, skipping meals or becoming dehydrated. Carry snacks with you and make sure you drink plenty of water during the flight. Avoid drinking caffeine and alcohol, as these make you dehydrated more quickly. Get as much sleep as possible on the plane.

Jet lag is a common problem, particularly if you fly across a number of time zones. Your body clock gets confused and this can result in being tired and irritable. Being tired can also trigger seizures for some people.

Taking your medication whilst abroad

If you are travelling to a different time zone, speak to your doctor about the best time to take your medication. If you need to take your medication at the same time every day, it helps to carry two watches. Set one to local time and keep the other at UK time. You can then use the watch set at UK time to take your medication. This ensures that you take it at the time your body is used to.

Travelling with someone

If you still have seizures, it is safer to travel with someone who knows what to do. Carry our ID card and give a First Aid for Seizures guide to the person who will help will help keep you safe during a seizure.

What to do if you become sick

It is important to ensure that you have adequate travel insurance. Check what health services are available at your destination before your trip. See details below on how to get a new prescription abroad if you need it.

If you have vomiting and diarrhoea remember that you may not keep a sufficient level of your anti-epileptic medication in your system. This will put you at risk of having a seizure. Being sick can also cause dehydration, low blood sugar and poor sleep. These are all common seizure triggers.

Rehydration sachets can be available at most chemists. These will help you get over the effects of vomiting and diarrhoea quicker. If you cannot take your medication for a while, it is important to stay in a safe place and have someone with you in case you have a seizure.

Identification and medical records

It helps to have an ID card or other identification bracelet with you. These tell people you have epilepsy and what to do. You can get a free ID card and details on where to buy the jewellery from us. You can also get your medical records translated into the language of your destination country through a web service called DoctorBabel. There are two levels of service – one is free and one costs £20. You can find information on their website www.doctorbabel.com

Travel insurance

Insurance companies should not charge you extra for travel insurance simply because you have epilepsy. It depends how well your seizures are controlled. If you want information or have problems getting travel insurance, contact our helpline.

Obtaining anti-epileptic drugs outside the UK

NHS regulations state that no more than three months' supply of any medication should be prescribed at any one time. So if your trip is for longer than 3 months your GP will not be able to give you enough medication or provide an NHS prescription.

In the European Economic Area (EEA) you can use a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) to access healthcare. The EHIC replaces the E111 form. You are entitled to reduced cost or free medical treatment within the EEA.

EHIC application forms are available from the Post Office; online at www.ehic.org.uk or by telephoning 0845 606 2030.

Availability of anti-epileptic drugs

You can find out if your anti-epileptic drug (AED) is available in the country you are visiting from:

- your GP
- the drug company helpline that makes your anti-epileptic drugs
- a drug import/export organisation such as John Bell & Croyden (0207 935 5555) or IDIS (01932 824 100 www.idispharma.com)

If your AED is available in the country you are visiting you should get a private prescription from a doctor in that country. There will be a charge for this. Take a copy of your usual prescription or a note from your GP to give to the doctor abroad.

If your AED is not available in the country you are visiting you will need to find out if that country is allowed to import it. If it does you can ask a UK GP to write a private prescription and send it to John Bell and Croyden. This company will then send the AED to a doctor in the country you are visiting for you to pick up. You will also need to pay for the doctor abroad to write a prescription privately. You must organise this **before** you leave the UK.

If the country does not have your AED available and cannot import it you will need to consider changing your AED, the length of your stay, or your destination. You must speak to your doctor before you make any changes to your medication. Different brand names of the same medicine are not always interchangeable. The same medication made by a different company can be slightly different. Your usual medication manufactured by the same company but in a different country can be also slightly different. All these things can affect your seizure control.

For more help and advice call our helpline 0808 800 2200

Or email us at enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk