

Travelling abroad

We want to make it easy for you to prepare for a trip abroad. Have a look at our checklist below so you can stay safe and enjoy your time abroad.

Check for COVID-19 travel restrictions

Travel advice and restrictions currently get updated on a regular basis. Always check for latest information on the [Scottish Government website](#) or the [UK government website](#).

Get your GHIC/EHIC card

As the UK has now left the European Union (EU), different arrangements apply when you travel to EU countries.

Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC)

This card covers you for reduced cost, sometimes free, state healthcare of the EU country you are travelling in. Please note that each EU country may have a different healthcare system. In some countries, you may have to pay all or at least contribute towards the cost of emergency treatment.

You can use this card for medical emergencies but also for pre-existing conditions which may require some treatment while you are travelling in the EU. This is good news for people with epilepsy as it can sometimes be more expensive to obtain travel insurance if you have a pre-existing medical condition like epilepsy.

Unlike the old style EHIC card, this card will **not** cover you for travelling to countries such as Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. You may sometimes be able to use your UK passport to obtain emergency

treatment in these countries, but always take out travel insurance to cover you for these countries.

You can apply for a GHIC card **free** on the NHS (UK) website [here](#). Beware commercial websites which may try to charge you a fee for applying for GHIC.

Please note, the UK government recommends that you always take out adequate travel insurance to cover costs not covered by GHIC such as cost of rescue, repatriation, or if you are on a cruise.

Old style EHIC card

If you still have an old style EHIC card issued before 1 January 2021, you can continue to use it until it expires.

New UK EHIC card

Some UK residents will be able to apply for a new style EHIC. This includes British state pensioners living in the EU before 1 January 2021, and EU nationals (including those nationals from Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) and their families ordinarily resident in the UK before 1 January 2021.

If you are eligible for a new UK EHIC card, you will also be able to access emergency healthcare in Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

UK students who have lived in EU countries, and Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland before 1 January 2021 can also apply for the new EHIC card.

There is more information on who may be eligible and how to apply for a new style EHIC on the NHS (UK) website [here](#).

Take out travel insurance

Always take out private travel insurance even if the country you are travelling to is covered by your GHIC or EHIC. Some travel insurance companies require you to have a GHIC/EHIC card, always check the small print before you sign up to travel insurance.

You may have to approach some specialist travel insurance companies which specialise in covering pre-existing conditions such as epilepsy.

Always shop around for quotes to get the best deal possible. Insurance companies will assess the risk and will base their premiums on how well your seizures are controlled, how long you have had epilepsy and whether you have recently been hospitalised for your epilepsy.

Epilepsy Scotland have teamed up with Medical Travel Compared - a travel insurance comparison site which brings together many travel insurance companies that specialise in pre-existing medical conditions on one independent site. For every policy sold via our [dedicated link](#), the company will make a donation to our charity. Simply follow [this link](#) to make sure the donation comes to us. You can also access this link from our website [here](#).

Don't forget your anti-epileptic drugs

And don't forget to take **extra** medication in case of an unexpected delay. You may not get the same kind of brand of your medication or even the same medication in every country. In addition, many travel insurances will not cover you for the loss of medication (check the small print of your travel insurance).

Many people carry their medication in their hand luggage to reduce the risk of medicine getting lost, or at least split it between hand and hold luggage. Keep all your medications in their original containers. You can flatten the boxes to save on space but keep the labelled boxes as they are proof that these medications are prescribed to you. You can also take a copy of your repeat prescription listing the medications you take.

Current airline security means that you can only carry liquid medication in your hand luggage if it's in bottles of no more than 100mls per item, which fit in a small 1 litre sealable clear bag. Any liquid medicines over 100mls must be carried separately, and you need to carry a prescription or a letter from your doctor with it.

Different rules apply for carrying 'controlled drugs'. You may need a letter from your doctor or even a licence if you are staying longer than three months.

Some epilepsy medications are considered 'controlled drugs'. Currently, these are (always check with your specialist before you travel):

- Buccal midazolam
- Clobazam
- Clonazepam

- Diazepam
- Gabapentin
- Phenobarbital/phenobarbitone
- Pregabalin

Important: always check with the country's embassy, high commission or consulate before you travel to ensure your epilepsy medication or other prescribed medication is legal in the country of your destination. Drugs that are legally prescribed in the UK may be prohibited in other countries. For most up-to-date information on travelling abroad, especially if you have a medical condition, check out [the UK government](#) website.

Check if you need a vaccination

Most vaccines can be safely taken by people with epilepsy including COVID-19 vaccines.

If you are travelling to a country that requires you to take anti-malaria medication, seek further medical advice, as some anti-malaria drugs are not suitable for people with epilepsy.

Carry medical identification

This is of course not compulsory, but it can help to have an ID-style card on you or wear medical identification jewellery such as a bracelet or necklace. This might help first responders or paramedics if you have a seizure and lets them know what medications you take.

We can post to you one of our free 'I have epilepsy' cards.

Be mindful of your seizure triggers

Flying

Flying itself is not known to trigger seizures but be aware of factors associated with flying which could affect you. These include stress/fear of flying, tiredness/lack of 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. Sleep on the plane if you can.

Check if you need medical clearance for flying. This might be relevant if you have frequent uncontrolled seizures. [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\) guidelines](#) currently require you to get medical clearance for flying from your doctor if you have had a tonic-clonic seizure within 24 hours before flying

You may also want to let the airline know in advance of your epilepsy, or at least talk to cabin crew before take-off to let them know you have epilepsy. This will allow them to keep an eye on you and be able to help if you have a seizure mid-air.

Be mindful of jet lag after long haul flights which can leave you tired. Sleep when you arrive and allow your body clock to gradually reset by resting as much as you can. This is particularly important if tiredness is a seizure trigger for you

Extreme temperatures

High temperatures or humid conditions can also sometimes make seizures more likely. Staying hydrated and staying indoors when temperatures are at their highest can prevent seizures.

Feeling unwell

Vomiting and diarrhoea can lower the amount of available medication in your system and make a seizure more likely. Being sick can also cause dehydration, low blood sugar and poor sleep, which can be seizure triggers. Rehydration sachets can help you get over the effects of vomiting and diarrhoea quicker.

If you cannot take your medication for a while, become unwell and/or run a temperature, stay in a safe place and have someone with you in case you have a seizure.

Take your medication on time

The excitement of being on holiday and different routines can easily make you forget to take your medication. Set a phone reminder or ask family/friends to remind you.

If you are travelling to a different time zone, speak to your doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse about how to take your medication and how to safely adjust the timing. If you need to take your medication at the same UK time every day, carry a separate watch set at UK time as a reminder. Be mindful though that waking yourself up in the middle of the night and disrupting your sleep can trigger a seizure if tiredness is a seizure trigger for you.

Your doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse may instead advise to gradually adjust the time for taking your medication before leaving and when returning consistent with local times.

How to get more medication

If you have lost or run out of your epilepsy medication, this is what you need to do:

On a short stay

If you are in **Ireland or Spain**, your GP may be able to email a NHS prescription to a local pharmacist as both countries have agreed to still accept NHS prescriptions after Brexit.

For other EU countries, you may be able to use your EHIC/GHIC card to get a replacement prescription free of charge or at reduced cost.

For all other countries, you need to contact a local doctor, pharmacist or hospital for a private prescription. Make sure you know the exact name (generic and brand name) of your anti-epileptic drug(s).

If you cannot get your current medication, contact your epilepsy specialist nurse or GP in the UK for further medical advice.

Long stay – more than three months

Your GP can only give you a NHS prescription for a maximum of three months. Three months should give you enough time to settle and find out how to access and register with local health care services.

Do your research before you go as your drug may not be available in the country of your destination. You can find out more from your GP, epilepsy specialist nurse or the drug company which makes your drug.

If your medication is not available, you must speak to your epilepsy specialist nurse in good time before you travel to see if you can slowly switch to an alternative available drug to ensure continuity of treatment. Please remember, even if your current medication is available, you may not always be able to get the exact brand or generic version, which can sometimes impact on seizure control when switching.

Check you can legally drive abroad

If you intend to drive abroad, make sure you check out the country's driving regulations. Some countries have stricter regulations for people with epilepsy than the UK.

Our resources are always free. If you would like to support our work, please text FACTS to 70085 to donate £3. Texts cost £3 plus one standard rate message.



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