



Travel and Epilepsy

Be it for work or pleasure, travel is a part of life for people with epilepsy. Unfamiliar surroundings, combined with the unpredictable nature of seizures could make planning a successful trip seem challenging, but with common sense and advance planning, an adult or child with epilepsy can have a safe and enjoyable trip.

Talk to Your Doctor

At least a month before your trip, contact your doctor or nurse to discuss your plans and request any information or assistance. For example, you may need a new prescription to refill your medications before you go, or you may need your doctor to sign your insurance application. If you need vaccinations, ask your doctor whether or not this will affect your medications. If travel is a regular part of your lifestyle, be sure to discuss this with your doctor, as it may factor into treatment choices or medical evaluations.

Pack Carefully

Before your trip, check the latest packing regulations for the carrier with which you are travelling. Unless otherwise specified, keep your medications in their original bottles in your carry-on luggage, and carry enough for your entire trip. You may also want to keep an extra supply of medication in your checked bag in case your carry-on goes missing.

Carry Medical Identification

Carry a wallet card explaining your condition, listing your emergency contacts, and outlining what to do in case you have a seizure. If possible, carry another copy of your information translated into the languages of any other countries you will be visiting. If your medication goes by a different name in the country you will be visiting, include that information. Consider wearing a medical id bracelet. For examples of wallet cards and information on medical id jewelry, please contact the BC Epilepsy Society.

Effects on Treatment

Consider any circumstances that might affect the treatments you use to control your epilepsy.

- **Medications:** If you are changing timezones, plan to shift your medication schedule accordingly. Alternatively, you may set an alarm on your watch to keep taking your pills at your regular time if that is more convenient, or if your trip will be brief.
- **Vagus Nerve Stimulator (VNS):** Talk to your doctor or nurse ahead of time for any recommendations. Be sure to carry your device registration card or papers for details about type and maintenance. For more information on travelling with a VNS, visit Epilepsy.com at www.epilepsy.com/epilepsy/travel_tips_vns_other_treatment
- **Ketogenic Diet:** Talk to your nurse or dietitian about planning a menu for your trip. Be sure to book lodgings that include a kitchen for meal preparation. Bring your own scale and cooler, and look into local sources for key ingredients, such as cream.



Seizure Triggers

Some people with epilepsy notice that they have certain triggers that make them more likely to have seizures. These vary from person to person, but the most common triggers are disturbed sleep and missed medications, both of which are risks when you're crossing timezones and visiting new places. Pay attention to your general health, and be cautious about dehydration and overheating. Staying in optimal health will help any person enjoy their trip as much as possible.

Seizure Types

Consider your typical symptoms, and what might happen if you experience them in different settings. For example, if you may have memory problems, carry a detailed travel itinerary in your bag, along with contact information and directions to your hotel. Be sure to discuss possibilities with any travel companions, and make plans to avoid complications.

Recreational Activities

With some planning and precautions, you should be able to take part in most of the experiences available at your destination. Consider the possibilities, and be particularly careful with water sports and climbing. Be sure that a travel companion, instructor, or lifeguard knows about your safety needs.

Travel Insurance

It's a good idea for any Canadian to have travel insurance when they leave the country. Different insurance companies have different regulations when it comes to covering a person with a pre-existing health condition such as epilepsy. Shop around to get the best coverage.

Special Accommodations

When booking tickets or lodgings, ask about accommodations for any special needs. Some companies will offer companion rates for people travelling with a person with a health condition that needs to be actively managed.

Returning Home

When you get home, give yourself time to get back to your regular routine and good health. Take some time to sit down and think about what went well, and what should be considered in future travels. After that, start planning for your next destination!

Additional Information

The International Bureau for Epilepsy has a Traveler's Handbook for People with Epilepsy, which can be downloaded in many languages: <http://www.ibe-travelhandbook.org/>

About Kids Health has helpful tips for travelling with kids with epilepsy:

www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/ResourceCentres/Epilepsy/AtHomeandAtSchool/LeisureandRecreation/Pages/Epilepsy-and-Travel.aspx

Approved for circulation in April 2016 (MC)

You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all the program and service benefits.

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