

Most people with epilepsy can travel without great difficulty. It is a good idea to plan ahead and consider anything that may affect seizures during your trip. Here we discuss some general travel guidelines.

Documentation

It may help to:

- Carry copies of important documents, separate from the originals. Keep them in a waterproof bag or plastic. Leave copies with someone in Australia.
- Include in these documents your emergency contact such as next of kin and numbers to call if needed.
- Make or update wills, give friends or family a copy of the itinerary and make regular contact when away for a long period.
- Know where the Australian Consulate or High Commission is located in the countries you are visiting.
- Obtain a letter from your doctor stating your seizure types, medications prescribed and the doctor's contact details. The letter can be shown to Customs or a treating doctor, if required.



Preparing for the trip

1. **Travelling:** Some people's seizures can be triggered by being very tired, excited or anxious all of which can happen when travelling, particularly long flights. As tiredness is a common trigger for seizures, reduce fatigue by allowing enough rest time during and immediately after the trip. If the flight is lengthy or travels across time zones, discuss ways to manage jet lag with the doctor.
2. **Flying:**
 - a. Check the particular airline's website for information about their fitness to fly requirements and restrictions as these differ greatly between airlines. The airline may offer a reduced fare for an accompanying carer.
 - b. **Inform the airline:** Tell the airline about your epilepsy and any other important aspects when booking so the cabin crew will be aware of your requirements should a seizure occur during the flight.
 - c. **Medical clearance to fly:** You may also need clearance from your doctor if you have had recent seizures. Some airlines won't let you fly if you have had a seizure within 24 hours.
3. **Vaccinations:** Some countries require vaccinations before visiting. Well before the departure date, visit your doctor and discuss vaccinations or other health precautions that are needed, and what effect these may have your seizures. Travel doctors are also very helpful <http://www.travel-doctor.com.au/enquire2/>
4. **Health care:** Standards vary for each country, and if you have poorly controlled seizures it is important to have an idea about the country's health care standards, how to access health care and potential costs for the country you are visiting. Some countries have a reciprocal agreement with Australia to reduce costs, but travel insurance is vital for any trip. See <http://smartraveller.gov.au/> for more information.
5. **Investigate travel insurance:** Most insurance companies regard epilepsy as a pre-existing condition and will charge a higher premium. Shop around or ask the travel agent for assistance. It may be difficult finding insurance, especially if you have had recent seizures. A pre-existing disclosure form will usually need to be completed. It is important to be accurate and honest. Should a claim be lodged, the insurance company will check if medical treatment has been previously received. If seizures have not been disclosed, it may invalidate the claim.
6. **Seizures:** If seizures are likely to occur during the trip, take a travelling companion who is familiar with your seizures, or join an organised tour with a trip leader who can assist if seizures occur or medical treatment is needed.

Fact Sheet: Travel

7. **Medical ID:** Consider getting a medical ID bracelet. Some identification is always advisable particularly when carrying medications or if seizures happen.
8. **Medications:** Check that your medication is available in, or can be taken to, the countries you are visiting. Medication sold overseas may have a different name or be a slightly different formulation. Contact the pharmaceutical company for specific details. You can take up to 3 months supply of medications in the original containers in which they were dispensed, detailing your name, the medication name and dose prescribed along with a letter from your doctor. Keep a complete supply of medications for the trip and put some in your carry-on luggage in case your main luggage gets lost or delayed. For a lengthy trip, you will have to speak to your doctor about how to obtain more medication overseas, if you need to. For an informative video regarding travelling with medications and medical devices see <https://www.tga.gov.au/travelling-medicines-and-medical-devices>
9. **Other medications or supplements:** If you have any other medications, over the counter medications or complementary therapies, these are still considered a medical product and you will need to also enquire as to whether you can take them with you - with or without documentation.
10. **Driving:** People with an Australian driver's licence who wish to drive in another country should check local guidelines on driving and epilepsy, as these vary. It may be illegal for you to drive in some countries.
11. **Smart Traveller** can be a useful resource when planning your trip. <http://smartraveller.gov.au/>

During a flight

- If changing time zones, space medication doses over a 24 hour period so take your medications every 12 hours. If medications are normally taken at other times, discuss when to take them with your doctor.
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs that may trigger seizures.
- Try to maintain regular sleep patterns to avoid tiredness and possible seizures. A stopover is always a good idea on long haul flights.
- Avoid dehydration by drinking an adequate amount of water during the flight.

When in another country

Depending on the destination, check that water is safe to drink. Contaminated water can cause gastric upset even when it has only been used to brush teeth, wash food or in ice cubes. This can lead to vomiting and diarrhoea which reduces the absorption of antiepileptic medication and may cause seizures.

For more information:

- Reciprocal health care agreements <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/reciprocal-health-care-agreements>
- The Travel Doctor <http://www.traveldoctor.com.au/>
- Sample letter format for your doctor http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/travelling-overseas-with-pbs-medicine?utm_id=9
- For further information, phone the Health Insurance Commission's Drugs Diversion Enquiry line 1800 500 147 or visit the website www.hic.gov.au
- For travellers or visitors to Australia <http://www.tga.gov.au/travellers-visitors>
- Further resources, Travel Medicine: <http://www.travelmedicine.com.au/travel-health-information/resources/>



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This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.

