

Travelling is a great experience. People with epilepsy generally can travel without great difficulty, but it is a good idea to plan ahead and think about anything that may affect seizures during your trip. Here we discuss some general travel guidelines.

## Before you go

### Documents

It may help to:

- Make copies of important documents, separate from the originals. Keep them in a waterproof bag or plastic. Leave additional 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 your 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, treatment and medication prescribed. The letter can be shown to Customs or a treating doctor, if required.
- Always keep your medications in the original box or container with your details on it.



## Preparing for the trip

**Travelling:** Some people's seizures can be triggered by being very tired, excited, emotional or anxious - all of which can happen when travelling, particularly on long flights. Allow enough rest time during and immediately after the trip. If your flight is lengthy or travels across time zones, discuss ways to manage jet lag with your doctor.

### Flying:

- Check the 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.
- 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.
- 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.

**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/>



### **Preparing for the trip** continued...

**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, costs and how to access health care for the country you are visiting. Some countries have a reciprocal agreement with Australia, but travel insurance is vital for any trip.

**Emergency Services Contact Details:** Check ahead for emergency services contact details in the country you are visiting. Also make sure you will have phone service and your mobile is always charged.

**Investigate travel insurance:** 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.

**Seizures:** If you are likely to have seizures 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.

**Medical ID:** Consider getting a medical ID bracelet. Some medical identification is always advisable particularly when carrying medications or if seizures happen.

**Medications:** Check your medication is available in, or can be taken to, the countries you are visiting. The same 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, which has your name, the medication name and dose prescribed. 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 [click here](#).

**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.

**Driving:** People with an Australian driver's licence who wish to drive in another country should check local guidelines about driving and epilepsy, as these vary. It may not be possible for you to drive in some countries.



## **During a flight**

- If you are 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 times 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 enough water during the flight.

## **Water and hygiene overseas**

When in another country, 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 affects how your antiepileptic medication is absorbed and may cause seizures.

Along with the water precautions, your infection risk is higher due to the amount of people in close proximity in airports and on flights. To try and stay healthy, make sure you don't overdo things and get run down. Eat well, and get enough sleep.

It is a good idea to take a travel first aid pack. You may want to include hand sanitiser or wipes to clean your hands before eating, plus hydrating products and anti-vomiting medication if you have diarrhoea and vomiting. A travellers medical centre will be able to give you some advice on the best kit for you to take.

## **For more information:**

- [How to manage your PBS medication overseas](#)
- [Reciprocal health care agreements](#)
- [Smart Traveller](#) can be a useful resource when planning your trip.
- [The Travel Doctor](#)
- [For travellers or visitors to Australia](#)
- [Travel Medicine:](#)