

## HAVE TRANSPLANT, WILL TRAVEL: 10 TIPS FOR TRANSPLANT RECIPIENTS

Having a transplant shouldn't keep anyone from traveling; it just requires a little extra planning. By making travel arrangements in advance, I've been able to travel throughout the United States on both hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis. Now that I have a kidney transplant, it's even easier to travel. I've visited 14 National Parks, Niagara Falls (awesome!) and over twenty different countries with my new kidney.

Based on my experiences over the years, here are 10 tips to help make travelling with a transplant easier and safer:

1. **More is more!** Take a greater supply of your medications than you think you will need. Due to car problems, missed flights, or just the desire to enjoy an extra day at the beach, trips sometimes last longer than you originally planned. Avoid running out of your medicines by taking more than you think you will need. And don't guess when it comes to quantity—count pills out before you go!
2. **Stay original.** Keep medicines in their original bottles. You may be tempted to transfer your medicines to smaller travel containers to save space, but keeping them in their original bottles can help if you're questioned when you're going through airport security. It can also make it easier to fill your prescriptions if you somehow run out.
3. **Carry on is key.** If you are flying, keep your medicines with you on the plane. If your checked luggage is delayed or lost, you risk losing your medicines and not taking them on time as prescribed. Timing can be critical with immunosuppressants and depending on your medication schedule, you may have to take your meds during the flight. Unlike the movies, in real life, it's hard to get down to the cargo hold from the passenger compartment!
4. **Timing is everything!** Don't let a change in time zones throw you off schedule. My doctor has told me that I have 2-3 hour leeway in taking my daily medicines. Be sure to check with your own medical team to determine your individual medication window. If you have a 2-3 hour window and are traveling to a destination in a time zone within 2–3 hours of your home, you can ignore the time change and take your meds at the same clock time as you would have at home. In other words, if you take your meds at 7 am and 7 pm like me, you can stay on a 7 am and 7 pm local time schedule if you travel up to 3 time zones away. If you travel across more time zones, you may need to adjust your schedule to the local time. To take an extreme example, I've traveled 12 time zones away from my home and simply reversed my medicine schedule so that I take my 7am meds at 7 pm local time, and vice versa. When I get home I'm back on my usual schedule and haven't missed taking any medications. I find that it can be very helpful to carry an extra watch set with my home time. This way if there is any question as to the time differential between two locations, I can look at the clocks side by side.
5. **Make a list.** Keep a list of all your medications—and dosages—with you in your wallet or purse. Include on the list your doctor's name and phone number, your transplant center's phone number and the name and phone number of your emergency contacts. If you lose your medications or run out, this will make it easier to have a new prescription filled. Consider purchasing a medical ID bracelet for serious emergencies.
6. **Watch out for the rays.** Transplant medications can make us sensitive to sun exposure and, for many of us, more susceptible to skin cancer. Since vacations often take us to sunny locations, pack and use proper sun protection in the form hats, sunscreen, long sleeve t-shirts, etc. Use common sense by limiting your outdoor activities during the hours of greatest sun exposure, usually 10 am to 4 pm. Plan an indoor activity during those hours, such as taking a siesta or visiting a museum.
7. **Eat wisely.** Try the local specialties, but eat wisely. Minimize your chances of getting diarrhea by avoiding uncooked foods except for peeled fruits and vegetables. Take an anti-diarrhea medicine along with you just in case. (Ask your doctor which one is right for you.) If you have dietary restrictions and are traveling by plane during times when meals will be served, reach out to your airline carrier in advance to see if they can accommodate your diet. Otherwise, plan ahead and bring snacks that you know are safe for your body.
8. **Don't drink the water.** Or at a minimum, be extremely cautious about it. People who are immunosuppressed catch diseases more easily than others. Tap water in many countries is not as bacteria-free as in the U.S. because it is not intended for drinking. Ask the locals if the tap water is safe to drink. Obey signs warning you that the water is not for drinking. When in doubt, drink bottled water. To play it safe, I sometimes even rinse my teeth with bottled water after brushing.
9. **Know before you go.** Plan ahead and check with your doctor about any special vaccinations or medications that are recommended for the particular regions or countries that you are planning to visit. If you want to go to a destination where shots are recommended, check with your doctor well before your trip to determine whether shots are a good idea for you. And be sure to tell the clinic where you get your shot(s) that you are a transplant recipient. Also, consider taking mosquito repellent with you.
10. **Have Fun!** Transplant recipients can do almost anything other people can do, so get out there and have fun! Hike. Ski. Golf. Swim. Scuba dive. Run with bulls in Pamplona. Well, maybe that last one isn't such a good idea, but you get the point. My motto: Do as much as your body lets you. And send us a postcard while you're there!