

## Asthma and Travel

Whether you are travelling for a holiday or a business trip, you can still maintain good management of your asthma with some forward planning.

### Travel insurance

If you are travelling interstate or overseas, you should consider taking out travel insurance.

There are many different travel insurance policies available, and the level of cover provided and the conditions associated with each policy vary widely. It is best to do some research and compare policies to make sure you find one that provides adequate cover for your travels.

For people with asthma, their condition will often be described as a 'pre-existing medical condition' under travel insurance policies. In order to obtain cover for a pre-existing medical condition, you may have to meet certain conditions and requirements. For asthma, these generally include:

- Certain age restrictions
- A specified period of time in which you have had:
  - o No exacerbations of asthma
  - o No change in medication
  - o No hospital admissions
  - o No change in usual treatment required

If you cannot meet these conditions, you might also have to:

- have a medical assessment prior to the policy being issued
- pay an extra premium

This varies across insurers, so you should check the various policies available to ensure you can meet the conditions and requirements of the particular policy you choose.

### Special considerations

When you plan your trip, remember:

- Weather changes can bring on asthma symptoms, especially when the air is cold and dry.
- All beds and pillows can harbour dust mites. Be wary of hotels that look unclean.
- Scuba diving is dangerous for a person with asthma and should be avoided completely – try snorkelling instead.
- Be aware that different countries and cities have different allergens in the air which may trigger asthma symptoms or an allergic reaction.
- Travel to high altitudes is normally okay as long as your asthma is well managed at sea level.
- Trekking, sightseeing, swimming or skiing should be problem-free if you have well-controlled asthma, a written Asthma Action Plan and adequate supply of asthma medications.

### Visit your doctor before you go

Prior to taking your trip, visit your doctor to make sure your asthma is under good control well before you leave. Make sure your written Asthma Action Plan is up to date and if you don't already know, ask your doctor about strategies to handle your asthma if it worsens while on your trip.

Ask your doctor to write up a report on your asthma that includes your medical history, the severity of your condition, your current medications and what treatment you need in case of medical attention. Carry this document with you at all times in case of an emergency. You might need to present your doctor's report to international customs officials if they question your medication.

## Your medications

It is a good idea to:

- Take a little more medication than you think you'll need, just in case.
- Always keep a supply of your medication with you in your carry-on bag in case your suitcase is lost or damaged or you require it mid travel.
- Consider taking a prescription in case you lose all or some of your supplies.
- Take copies of your prescriptions with you to prove the medicine is for your own personal use.

## Equipment

- A spacer device is cheap and portable, which makes it a better choice for travelling than a nebuliser.
- If you need a nebuliser, allow for different voltages and power points when travelling overseas. You may need to obtain a power point adaptor.
- Ensure that the nebuliser pump can be used on the plane. You will need to make prior arrangements with the airline if you need to use your nebuliser on board the aircraft.
- Plan carefully when travelling to remote locations.
- Make sure you thoroughly understand how to use any unfamiliar equipment before you leave.

## Things to remember

- Make sure your day-to-day management of asthma is under control before you travel.
- Visit your doctor for a check-up and to fine tune your management, update your written Asthma Action Plan and provide you with a letter describing your asthma and your current medications.
- Check that your travel insurance policy specifically includes asthma, that you can meet any conditions or requirements, and that it offers the cover you need.
- Take more medication than you think you'll need and always carry some with you.
- Carry you medication in your hand luggage.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor or pharmacist
- Smartraveller: The Australian Government's travel advisory and consular assistance service, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade **W:** [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au)
- Insurance Council of Australia **W:** [www.insurancecouncil.com.au](http://www.insurancecouncil.com.au)
- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria:

**T:** (03) 9326 7088 **E:** [advice@asthma.org.au](mailto:advice@asthma.org.au) **W:** [www.asthma.org.au](http://www.asthma.org.au)

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