



Whether you are heading home for the holidays or traveling abroad for work or pleasure, knowing how to accommodate your special needs will become an integral step in planning your next trip.

DPreparing for a trip can be an overwhelming task at times. However, travel plans can become even more complicated when you are traveling with medications or require special accommodations for yourself or other individuals traveling with you due to physical and/or mental health issues. There are countless circumstances for which one may have to plan for in advance, and some can pose serious obstacles for unprepared travelers.

Handling individuals on medication to relieve anxiety while traveling without a companion. For example, if you are a parent traveling with a child prone to behavioral problems due to a medical condition, conduct disorder, Tourette Syndrome, bipolar disorder, etc., consider speaking to your doctor beforehand and ask his advice on who to alert while traveling (travel attendants, hotel administrator, etc.) or what type of documentation you will need to furnish if

syringes, etc.). For more information, go to www.fda.gov/ora/import/purchasing_medications.htm or www.customs.gov/travel/med.

When transporting medication, it is important to pack it in your carry-on bag so that you have immediate access to it, to protect it from over exposure to heat and light, and to reduce the chance of it being lost with checked luggage. And, just as importantly, be sure to pack an ample supply

Traveling with Special Needs

by Jessica S. Choksey

By taking the right precautions and making the required arrangements, you can solve most of your problems before they arise. Careful planning should make the experience as flawless and comfortable as possible for everyone involved.

There are many issues to consider before your trip begins. Soon after you determine the destination, length of stay and nature of your trip, you must consider how you live your daily life and what accommodations must be met to sustain that level of care for yourself or others in your care while traveling.

When making your travel arrangements, check with your travel agent, airline, train/bus station or cruise line, as well as your hotel, to be sure they can meet your needs. Such accommodations may include wheelchair accessibility, seating options for infants or small children, knowledge of their policy for dealing with individuals with behavioral issues, or the policy for han-

dling individuals on medication to relieve an outburst. In the event someone questions your actions, this can be a very important consideration, as it may dissuade any unwarranted assumptions or concerns. Though it takes extra effort on your part to convey these concerns, it is worth seeking answers to your questions and having solutions to your problems.

If you are traveling with medication, there are several things to consider. First, be sure to inform your doctor that you will be traveling and need the proper documentation for all medicines you will be taking with you. For security purposes, all medicines must be contained in their original prescription bottles and some medicines need to be declared at the airport. For instance, if your medication requires self-injection (for diabetes, MS, etc.), you may need special documentation or instruction as to how to travel through airport security and customs with those materials (e.g.,

of your medication to last at least several days past your scheduled return and always carry a duplicate prescription for emergencies. Prepare for any unforeseen circumstances by having your insurance cards with you and checking to see if your coverage includes out-of-state medical attention and/or prescription coverage. You should also research a pharmacy near your destination in the event you need to have a prescription filled immediately, and make sure to carry your doctor's and pharmacist's numbers with you as well.

Some medicines also require additional care and consideration. Certain medications may cause side effects that you need to be aware of before you travel, or require specific instructions for transporting. Your doctor or pharmacist should be able to advise you of these concerns. For example, if a particular medicine causes photosensitivity, your doctor/pharmacist may advise you to limit your time spent outdoors—something

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you may want to consider before planning a trip to the beach! Other considerations include whether your medication can be taken while flying, what over the counter meds you may take that could interact with your prescription, and how to manage dosage times when crossing through different time zones (for more information visit www.safemedication.com).

When traveling outside the U.S., transporting medication can be even more difficult. You will need to know if there are any restrictions on carrying certain medications, the amount of each prescription that can be transported, and if more documentation is required for customs to avoid confiscation. It is extremely important to remember that purchasing over-the-counter drugs in another country may not be advisable, since your doctor or pharmacists may not be familiar with their side effects or drug interactions. To find out more about inter-

national travel matters, you may want to speak directly to your doctor about medical concerns (prescriptions, vaccinations, etc.), and contact airlines with specific questions (restrictions, security/customs procedures, etc.) For more information visit www.customs.gov.travel.med.

To ensure a safe and uneventful trip for you or those traveling with you, the bottom line is to be prepared. Ask questions, look for answers, give yourself time to plan and pack according to your daily needs.

And, after all of your questions and concerns have been handled, all your arrangements have been settled, and all the medications and documents have been organized, you should prepare a medical folder for everyone in your party. In this folder you should have copies of medical/insurance cards (originals should be in your possession at all times), all doctors', therapists' and pharmacists' numbers, lists of allergies

for each individual (including medicine, food, etc.), vaccination history (for foreign travel), emergency contact numbers, and emergency consent forms in the event you are unable to provide consent for those in your care.

Make that visit home for the holidays or family vacation a little less hectic by taking the time to think through all the small details before they have the chance to add up to something big. ■

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