



TRAVEL ABROAD

Some people with epilepsy have concerns about travelling abroad in general and flying in particular. There is no evidence to suggest that flying is harmful and people with epilepsy travel the world.

Reducing risk

If the epilepsy is not completely controlled it may be advisable to let the travel agent/cabin staff know. Some airlines also have additional guidelines concerning people with epilepsy. Further details may be available from your travel agent or directly from the airline concerned.

Try to avoid disruption to sleep patterns as much as possible as this can trigger seizures in some people. If practical, your medication should be taken according to your usual pattern rather than at the time of the country you are visiting. Some people prefer to take two watches, keeping one at British time and take the medication accordingly. It may be necessary to adjust this slightly as your next dosage may be due in the middle of the night, for example. Seeking advice from your GP/specialist can be helpful as our guidelines can only be general so may not suit your individual needs.

Medication

When you are flying, it is advisable to carry your medication in your hand luggage or a personalised medical kit bag (available from The Yellow Cross Company), if this is possible. This is in case your main luggage is delayed or lost.

Current airport security measures mean that you are allowed to carry medicines in solid form (such

as tablets and capsules) in your hand luggage. You can also carry liquid medicines (such as syrups) in your hand luggage, but this must be in containers of 100ml or less and you must prove that these really are prescription drugs. You could do this by carrying a copy of your prescription.

If you need to carry a container with more than 100ml of liquid medicine in your hand luggage (to ensure you have enough for the journey), you must get permission from the airline and the airport before you travel. You must also bring a letter to support this from a relevant qualified medical professional.

It is always advisable to check the hand luggage restrictions with the airline or airport before you travel, as these may change.

When you are travelling, it is a good idea to carry a spare prescription separately from your medication. This could be used if your medication needs replacing (should it be lost or stolen) and also prove why you need the drugs in countries where prescribing laws might be different to the UK.

On longer trips, it is advisable to investigate the availability of your particular drug(s) in each country you intend to visit before you travel. The drug(s) you are taking may not be available or may be known under a different name. It is not sensible to travel with large quantities of drugs as there may be customs restrictions and the quality of the drug could be lessened due to heat or humidity.

Urgently needed medical treatment may be obtained free or at a reduced cost in countries with which the United Kingdom has a health care arrangement (see Obtaining anti-epileptic drugs outside the UK). We strongly recommend however that you obtain travel insurance irrespective of which country you will be visiting as facilities and the cost of medical care can vary. Also make sure that the holiday insurance includes cover for your medical condition. Read the exclusion clauses carefully. Epilepsy Action can put you in contact with an insurance company that provides holiday insurance for people with epilepsy.

Vaccinations

It is important to receive the relevant vaccinations for the country you intend to visit. Most types of vaccines are perfectly safe for people with a history of epilepsy. Antimalarial medication can pose a problem for people with epilepsy or who have a history of epilepsy. Your GP should be able to advise you further. The Epilepsy Research Foundation also produces a detailed information sheet called Epilepsy and Antimalarial Medication (available from Epilepsy Action). There are also special automated helplines for advice and information on malaria:

- Travel Clinic Healthline: 09061 337733 premium rate
- Travellers' Healthline: 0891 224100 premium rate
- Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad: 0906 550 1402 - an automated helpline at premium rate, or visit www.masta.org to download information.

Obtaining anti-epileptic drugs outside UK

NHS regulations state that no more than three months' supply of any medication should be prescribed at any one time. Once someone has been out of the UK for three months or more, the

GP is not able to provide an NHS prescription and may take the patient off their register.

You can receive healthcare while visiting a European Economic Area (EEA) by obtaining the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This replaced the E111 on 31 December 2005. More detailed information about the EHIC can be obtained from the Department of Health (see contact addresses below).

The EHIC will entitle you to reduced-cost, sometimes free, medical treatment that might become necessary while in an EEA.

The EHIC authorises treatment in another EEA country on the same basis as that offered to that country's own insured people. The EHIC is normally valid for three to five years. An EHIC can be applied for by; obtaining an application form from the Post Office; on line at www.ehic.org.uk or by telephoning 0845 606 2030.

If the drug is available in the country to be visited

A private prescription can be obtained from a doctor in that country. Take a copy of your usual prescription or a note from your GP to give to the doctor abroad.

If the drug is not available in the country to be visited

It is necessary to find out if the country has an import licence or special authorisation. The relevant drug company, John Bell & Croydon or IDIS can provide this information.

If the country to be visited does have an import licence the drugs can be obtained in one of two ways.

- In the person's absence a UK GP can write a private prescription to be sent to John

Bell & Croydon. This company can then send the drug directly to the person concerned. This would all need to be organised before leaving the UK.

- The person will need to organise and pay privately for a doctor abroad to write a prescription. The doctor can then arrange for John Bell & Croydon or IDIS to send the drug directly to him/her for their patient to collect.

If the country to be visited does not have an import licence there are two choices.

- The person could change to another manufacturer's version of the same drug (if available) although this could affect seizure control and/or side effects.
- The person could reconsider whether to go to that particular country.

Contact addresses

- Department of Health, International Branch, Room 607 Wellington House, 133-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG. Telephone: 020 7210 4850
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Northern Ireland), General Medical Services Branch, Room D3, Castle Buildings, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast BT4 3SQ. Telephone: 028 9052 0500
- Epilepsy Research Foundation, PO Box 3004, London W4 4XT. Telephone: 020 8995 4781; info@erf.org.uk, www.erf.org.uk
- IDIS Ltd, IDIS House, Churchfield Road, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 8DB. Telephone: 01932 824 100; enquiries@idispharma.com www.idispharma.com
- John Bell & Croydon, 50-54 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2AU.

Telephone: 020 7935 5555; jbc@aah.co.uk

- The Yellow Cross Company Ltd, P.O.Box 448, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8ZU. Telephone: 01252 820 321; info@yellowcross.co.uk www.yellowcross.co.uk

Available from Epilepsy Action

Epilepsy ID booklet with first aid instructions in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese and English. Contact the freephone Epilepsy Helpline for further details.

Medical record/translation service

DoctorBabel is an online medical records service. It allows you to record details of your medical conditions, treatments and any relevant medical information into a password protected site on your computer. This information can then be printed out in a card-sized printout to carry in your purse and wallet. This service is free.

In addition, your records can be translated into many different languages. The full translation feature can be activated at a cost of £20. You can then update and translate your record into any of a number of languages as often as you wish. If travelling to Spain for example, you print your medical record in English and Spanish in a card-sized printout and carry this in your wallet. www.doctorbabel.com

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information in its publications but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

If you are reading this publication more than 12 months after the date shown below, please contact Epilepsy Action to check whether it is still current.

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