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How to travel safely if you have allergies

Ahh holidays. Spending your time relaxing in the sun or seeing the sights in a dream destination should be blissful. But if you or your child suffer from allergies, planning a trip can be stressful. We look at how to minimise risk and maximise relaxation for allergy sufferers.

Prepare your medication

If you're going away for a long period, make sure you have sufficient, in-date medication to cover your trip and plan how you will store this medication on a flight. Whilst it might seem logical to carry an emergency dose with you, and store some in the hold, [Allergy UK](#) advises against this: "The aircraft hold may be subject to extremes of temperatures." Instead, it's better to take medicine on board, and ensure some is in easy reach.

You may need to provide medical proof from a doctor when taking your medications on board, so check the rules regarding your medication well in advance so you can secure the necessary paperwork.

Make sure you're covered

Planning a holiday, ensuring you and your family have everything you need, is already fraught; but it's important you check information relating to your allergy before you travel too.

"When planning a trip by plane, check the airline's food allergy management policy before making your booking so you can decide when to inform them of your allergies," advises Dr Luke Powles, associate clinical director at [Bupa UK](#).

It's also important to ensure that you declare your [allergy](#) when booking your travel insurance to ensure you are covered. Whilst this may mean you need to shop around and pay a little more, not declaring a pre-existing condition could invalidate any policy.

"The best advice is to declare any allergy, whether the response is [anaphylaxis](#) or not," agrees Shushanah Tolley, senior administrator from World First Travel Insurance. "You will then be asked if you are at risk of anaphylaxis and, if so, when the last incident was, and if you have an [EpiPen](#). From our perspective, if they have been trouble-free for twelve months or more, the risk would be considered minimal."

Be realistic about risk

If you've lived with allergies for years, it's easy to forget that not everyone will be as informed as you - and may not understand the significance or seriousness of a potential reaction. So whilst you may take personal precautions, you cannot rely on others to take your allergy as seriously as you do. As well as informing airline staff and any food providers of your trigger, make sure they understand what might happen in the event of a reaction - particularly if you are at risk of anaphylaxis.

In addition, it's crucial that you understand the limits of any protection offered. For example, even the 'nut-free flights' offered by some airlines are not able to offer a guarantee.

"Even when airlines have adopted a nut-free policy, this does not stop other passengers eating nuts, and/or nut-containing foods, at the airport prior to boarding or bringing these foods on to a flight and eating them," according to Allergy UK.

Communicate clearly

It's not the most uplifting topic of conversation, but it's crucial that anyone you're travelling with understands your allergy, the risks and how to treat it if necessary; particularly if you're travelling with someone for the first time.

"Make sure your friends and family know how to administer your medication if you're not able to," advises Powles.

It's important, too, that you look up key phrases in the local language if travelling to a non-English-speaking country. Alternatively: "If there's a language barrier, bring translation cards in relation to your specific allergies, which can be useful both when ordering food and in the event of a reaction," advises Powles. Translation cards can be purchased for a small fee from [Allergy UK](#).

Identify hazards

Whilst for many eating out at a range of restaurants is part of a great holiday, for the allergy sufferer, enjoying local fayre can be problematic. For this reason, you may prefer to opt for self-catering and even prepare safe snacks to take out with you.

"If you decide to dine out, let the staff know about your allergies beforehand if possible, and also when you arrive," advises Powles. "Ensure that their food preparation facilities don't risk cross contamination with any of your triggers."

It's important to bear in mind that in the event of a reaction, time may be of the essence. Make sure you familiarise yourself with emergency numbers of your destination, and find out in advance about doctor and emergency services locally.

Taking care of children

When you have a child who might develop an allergic reaction, travelling can be a worrying time. Emma Amoscato, author of [Living with Allergies](#), has two children with allergies and is familiar with the hazards of travel.

"Travelling with children who have allergies is all about planning. We make sure we have researched the destination, know where to get safe food and have allergy translation cards and emergency numbers readily available. We then pack for the flight - medication easily accessible in our hand luggage, wipes to clean our area and lots more snacks than we think we will need!" she says.

"At our destination, we take an insulated medication pack to protect adrenaline injectors from the heat, and plenty of Tupperware and picnic bags to pack food on the go."

In addition, if you need to pack milk or other liquids for your baby, make sure you check the requirements of your carrier – you may need to book extra hand-luggage or comply with specific requirements. More information can be found on www.gov.uk but as rules may vary it's important to check your travel provider's website too.

Whilst having allergies might present some additional problems, ensuring you are well prepared should mean you have a relaxing and low-risk holiday.

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