

Traveling with Asthma

Summer vacation. It conjures up visions of relaxation, sports, sunny days, perhaps sand and water or woodlands. For individuals and families with asthma and allergies though, it means extra thought and preparation before "the good times roll."

As we head full tilt into summer, here is a list of some common sense—but commonly missed—suggestions for a healthy vacation.

Medications

- Take with you a detailed list of medications showing prescription refill number, prescribing physician and dosage.

(Each medication's original label should have all the needed information.)

- Pack the needed quantities of medications and, if possible, also pack a backup quantity to avoid being caught short.

Be sure to pack your medication in your carry-on luggage in case checked luggage is lost.

- Be sure to bring an emergency, insect-sting epinephrine injection kit if you or someone in your family has this form of hypersensitivity.

- Include with your medications a topical hydrocortisone cream and antihistamine (prescription medication if available, or an over-the-counter brand previously used with good results).

Equipment

- If someone with asthma is using a peak flow meter, be sure to bring it along on your vacation, with the chart that is used to record results.

- If you are using a nebulizer to deliver anti-asthma medication, it should not be left at home when going on vacation. Be sure that, if traveling abroad, you have an electrical current converter for the nebulizer. For campers and others who will be spending vacation periods in "the rough," portable nebulizers powered off an auto cigarette lighter receptacle are available.

- To protect against dust mites, it may be wise to pack your own allergy-proof pillow or mattress casings.

- People with acute asthma and allergy conditions should consider wearing a medical alert-type necklace or bracelet at all times.

Insuring Health Care Availability on Vacation
Check the extent and limitations of your medical insurance policies before leaving the country or your state. Know in advance if your plan or group will cover physician and hospital visits away from its operating territories. When you know your vacation destination, get recommendations from your physician for asthma and allergy specialists in that area, or contact the local state medical society at the destination for recommendations on area specialists. In relatively populated areas, ask for several potential healthcare providers, to allow for comparisons. You can also write, call or visit the web sites of the following organizations:

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

611 East Wells Street

Milwaukee, WI 53202

800-822-2762 American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology

85 W. Algonquin Road, Suite 550

Arlington, IL 60005

800-842-7777 If your vacation takes you to a foreign land, you might consider contacting the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers. For a low-cost donation to this nonprofit organization, you can receive a directory of English-speaking physicians worldwide who have trained in either the U.S., Canada or the United Kingdom. It can also provide forms for your own clinical records, immunization information for specific countries and worldwide climate charts. For further details call: IAMAT at 417 Center Street, Lewiston, NY, 14092; or call (716) 754-4883.

Sensible Behaviors and Actions

- During the hot weather season, people with asthma and allergies should drink plenty of fluids.

- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke whenever possible.

- Call ahead to order a special meal on the airplane. Or pack your own "safe" snacks.

- When eating out, ask the waiter if sulfites have been used as a food preservative. If so, find out whether special preparations without sulfite additives can be ordered. If eating out in a country where you don't speak the language, have a warning note drafted in the local language that alerts wait staff to your allergy.

- Prior to beginning a lengthy auto trip to your vacation spot, take appropriate measures to rid the vehicle's ventilating and air conditioning system of mold and mildew.

- For those prone to exercise-induced asthma, it may be a good idea to keep prescribed emergency medication on you at all times.

- Request a hotel room that is nonsmoking and mold-free.

- If you have questions about the primary allergens and pollen count in the area you are visiting, contact the local Chamber of Commerce. Or you can call the National Allergy Bureau at 1-800-9-POLLEN or visit the Asthma and Allergy page of our website. AAFA also has a national network of educational support groups. One may be in the area you are traveling to and could provide you with useful local information. Call 800-7-ASTHMA for support group contacts.