

On the Road Again: Travel Tips for Summer Vacations!



Are you hesitating about making vacation or travel plans? Is your IBD holding you back?

Maybe it is time to “reboot.” Any successful vacation requires a lot of planning. When health issues loom large, the planning is more involved. However, vacation travel is well within the reach of any patient who is already managing Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis.

Timing is everything in life and in travel. Although you may not be able to predict a flare, vacation travel should be restricted to periods of remission and control of your IBD. Discuss your plans with your healthcare team. They may even recommend updating immunizations.

The “what ifs” will never go away. Remember that the rationale behind the travel insurance business is that the unexpected can happen to anyone. Purchase insurance, if applicable, that will cover your investment if medical problems arise. It will be well worth the peace of mind.

Getting on with vacation is much like getting on with your life. You need to

focus on the factors that matter every day. Taking medications on time—particularly with time zone changing—eating safely and nutritiously, hydration, and sufficient rest are crucial. Travelling successfully requires control over your changing environment. Do not worry about looking like a “control freak.” Do what you have to do to get it right.

Trains, planes, and automobiles

No matter what the distance or mode of transportation, there are common considerations for all travel with IBD:

A medical intervention plan

The plan should include names and contact information for gastroenterologists who treat IBD at the destination. Your medical team can help with the identification of resources. For foreign travelers, the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers provides lists of English-speaking doctors, for a donation. They are at 716-754-4883. Do some research on hospitals as well so you know where you would head in case of an emergency, and check out the location and hours of pharmacies near where you are staying. Pharmacies are a great resource, even more so in other countries.

A dietary strategy that is defensive (and nutritious)

The diet that works for you at home should dictate your meal plans while travelling. Don’t become a victim of circumstances. Take packable dry foods, like oatmeal and nutrition bars and packets of salt and electrolyte supplements. Bring a cooler and cool packs and a knife for peeling fruits. Take portable utensils and disposable dishes.

Consume bottled water only, including for mouth rinsing, and avoid ice cubes. Do not take risks with street vendor foods. Locate supermarkets where you can buy your next fresh meal. Book a room or suite where cooking facilities are available. You’ll save money and reduce your risks.

Avoid or limit your use of fast food restaurants to the rare safe options. Never eat from a buffet service. In restaurants, ask if they will do special orders to conform to your dietary needs, before you sit down. Call or visit in advance. If you travel by air overseas, order a special meal when you book that best suits you. Be sure to carry your daily supplements and do not deviate from that routine.

Rx for Successful Traveling

Your medications are a key to maintaining your health in IBD. Have a fail-safe plan. Bring all medications in original containers. Create a list of all of them to carry on hard copy and in your portable computer device, if you have one. If you are travelling outside the US, get the names by which they are known in those countries. CCFA's website has a page dedicated to this information (see the list at right), or ask your pharmacist. Include names on a master list. Do the same with any OTC products that you use, based on your doctor's advice. If you take a medication that requires injections or infusions, discuss your travel schedule with your physician to be sure you are optimally medicated for the duration of your journey.

Paperwork

Have contact information for your home medical team, including your pharmacists. Also have photocopies of insurance cards and your passport when you travel internationally. A summary of your medical chart from your physician is also advisable. You may want to consider having it translated into the language of the country you are visiting, if applicable. Talk to your health insurance provider about the protocols for coverage out of state and in foreign countries if you are going international. You'll want to know in advance what your financial obligations might be in case of an emergency or for filling a prescription.

Location, Location, Location (of bathrooms!)

Most patients with IBD have memorized the map of restrooms related to their daily routines. Treat travel time with the same respect. When booking a reserved seat, find out where the closest lavatory is and book one in close proximity. When mapping a road trip, consult AAA or other trip planning guides for rest stops with

bathrooms. There is more than one route to get almost anywhere. Plan one that has more off-road stops with public restrooms. Remember, the scenic route may well be one that does not have the amenities of civilization that you require as a patient.

Always travel with your own toilet paper, soothing wipes, ointments and changes of underwear and extra clothes. Keep hand sanitizer handy in small bottles that can go through airport security, if applicable.

Learning the Lingo—(Toilette, WC, Loo, etc.)

If you are travelling outside of the US, make a point of knowing how to say "toilet" or "bathroom" and "urgent" or "emergency" and "pharmacy" and "doctor" in the local tongue. "Where is" could also help. There are many pocket electronic translators available today that could come in handy or apps for your mobile PC's or phones. Travel guidebooks usually include a lexicon of local vocabulary with phonetic pronunciation. In the US, it is helpful to have a CCFA identification card called "I can't wait," available to CCFA members, to explain that you do need to be first in line when there is one.

Feeling Secure with Transportation Security

We continue to see innovations in airport screenings to make us all safer. In order to achieve this, we all have had to sacrifice some convenience and privacy. If you have an ostomy, alert security personnel. They are trained to anticipate and respond to medical needs in screening travelers. Ostomy supplies are permitted through security checkpoints.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has a webpage specifically for travelers with medical conditions. Check it out before you

embark on air travel; you may need to make a verbal or written declaration of any liquid medication or nutrition supplement in excess of 3.4 ounces or 100ml. Be sure to put medications and essential supplies in your carryon, so you will have them with you at all times. You will be able to purchase water and other beverages after you pass through security to carry on-board.

Once you're prepared, relax, buckle up for safety, and enjoy the road ahead! ■

For more information:

- Travel advice and medication lexicon:
www.ccfa.org/living/travel
- International patient-based foundations:
www.ccfa.org/info/links
- International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers:
www.iamat.org
- US Citizen's Services listing of medical resources:
www.usembassy.gov
- TSA airport preparation:
www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds

