

Travelling Overseas with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Before making travel plans, consider risks that could affect your health, especially when travelling in developing countries. Many people with IBD take immune suppressing medication, which may make you more prone to infection.

Travel insurance

Buy comprehensive travel insurance that will cover your pre-existing illnesses (eg. IBD). If you become unwell overseas, hospital fees can be very expensive if you don't have travel insurance.

Medications

You should continue to take your regular medications while travelling. Be prepared for any unexpected situations. Take enough medication for the entire time you are away PLUS extras in case of an unexpected situation. For example flight cancellations or delays.

- ▶ Keep medications in your carry-on bags in case your luggage is lost
- ▶ If travelling for 2 weeks or more, take antibiotics to treat an infection. It may be difficult to access medical care overseas.
- ▶ Take steroids (eg. prednisolone) and pain tablets (eg. paracetamol) case you have an IBD flare.

Vaccinations

Visit a Travel Clinic or Infectious Diseases doctor before making any travel plans. Each country may have different risks, recommendations or requirements. Organise your vaccinations early so you are up to date with them before you leave. When taking immune suppressing medicine, do not have any "live" vaccines. Inactivated or non-live vaccines are safe to have.

Note: Yellow fever is a live vaccine. If you can't have the vaccine it is best to avoid travel in these countries. Otherwise, you'll need a medical exemption certificate from a travel clinic.

Gastroenteritis

People often get sick with gastroenteritis after eating poorly prepared food, drinking dirty water or poor hygiene and hand washing. Avoid gastroenteritis:

- ▶ *Wash your hands* – use alcohol hand gel or soap and clean water - especially before eating and after using the toilet
- ▶ Drink bottled water or boiled water (for >1 min)
- ▶ Clean teeth with bottled water
- ▶ Avoid swallowing water in the shower and swimming
- ▶ Avoid ice, salads washed in tap water, undercooked food or food that isn't cooked recently or peeled fruit

If you have gastroenteritis:

- ▶ Drink up to 3L to replace fluids lost PLUS oral rehydration solution (ORS)
- ▶ Slowly re-introduce foods when you are able, starting with bland, dry foods like rice or bread
- ▶ Start taking medication for gastroenteritis if your symptoms do not resolve on their own
- ▶ If symptoms worsen, even after taking gastro medication see a doctor

Medications for Gastro:
(obtain from GP or travel clinic)

Re-hydration salts: to replace lost salts (eg. ORS)

Anti-diarrhoea drugs: for moderate diarrhoea (eg. Gastro-stop, Loperimide)

Anti-nausea drugs: for moderate vomiting/nausea (eg. Maxolon, Stemetil)

Oral antibiotics: for bacterial gastro (eg. azithromycin, ciprofloxacin)

Travel Checklist

- Tell your gastroenterologist, IBD nurse and GP about your travel plans
- Buy travel insurance
- Visit a travel clinic for vaccinations and advice
- Carry enough regular medication for entire trip PLUS extras in case of emergencies
- Carry medicine in case of Traveller's Diarrhoea
- Carry steroids & pain medicine in case of an IBD flare
- For *Humira*: prepare to transport your medicine properly.
- For *Infliximab*: plan infusions between travel

Biologic therapy

Humira must be kept cool at all times. Carry *Humira* in a cool bag with ice packs until it can be stored in the fridge (up to 12 hours). Your IBD nurse can give you a letter for the airline. *Note:* Your airline may have restrictions for carrying fluids on board.

If on *Infliximab*, plan your travel between your infusions. Avoid delaying infusions.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

DVT is condition where a blood clot forms in a vein, usually the leg or arm. People with IBD can be at greater risk of DVTs. Discuss your risk with your treating doctor. *To prevent DVTs:*

- ▶ Get up and move around frequently when travelling for long periods.
- ▶ Wear loose, comfortable clothing
- ▶ Use correctly fitting compression stockings
- ▶ Drink at least 100ml per hours and avoid alcohol on flights

Mosquito Borne Diseases

The best way to prevent diseases spread by mosquito bites, such as Malaria, is to avoid being bitten.

- ▶ Use insect repellent (30% DEET or higher)
- ▶ Sleep under a mosquito bed net
- ▶ Wear long, loose-fitting, light-coloured clothes
- ▶ Ensure your accommodation has fly screens
- ▶ Treat clothes and bed nets with an insect repellent like permethrin (eg. Debug)

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is an infection affecting the lungs and other organs. It can be life threatening. The disease is spread through air when infected people cough or sneeze, and in unpasteurised dairy products. If you are on biologic therapy, travel to areas with high rates of TB should be avoided. The TB vaccine (BCG) is a live vaccine.

Reduce the risk of TB infection:

- ▶ Avoid crowded areas and travel on public transport
- ▶ Wear an N95 face mask to protect you
- ▶ Avoid poorly ventilated areas and open windows
- ▶ Avoid contact with people who look unwell, including family

Sun Protection

Cover up and strictly apply SPF30+ sunscreen. Some medications can make you prone to sunburn.

Useful Links

- ▶ www.crohnsandcolitis.com.au
- ▶ www.cdc.gov
- ▶ www.who.int/ith/en
- ▶ www.travelclinic.com.au
- ▶ www.traveldoctor.com.au

Further information

Speak to your gastroenterologist or IBD nurse for more advice.

- ▶ **IBD helpline: (03) 9288 3592**
- ▶ tamie.samyue@svhm.org.au

If you become unwell

If you become unwell after you return, it's important to contact your gastroenterologist or IBD nurse. You can also contact us if you are overseas and need advice.