

Vacationing with Diabetes

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It's summer vacation time. Have you had yours yet? Will you be visiting relatives and friends, going places you've come to enjoy or finding new ones, or staying home to relax or to take care of things that need tending?

Enjoying vacations without letting blood sugar or guilt get out of control

However you spend your vacation, you have to take your diabetes into account. You want to enjoy this special time without paying too high a price in blood sugar control or guilt. Some people do this by sticking as close to as possible to their regular routines for eating, activity, blood glucose monitoring, and other important parts of their tried and true diabetes management plan. They say that this works better for them than worrying about getting off track. I applaud people who are able to do this and still enjoy their vacations.

Unfortunately, most people can't do this. Sometimes vacation schedules are out of our control. And most people want to take a vacation from everything, including – and sometimes especially – their diabetes management routine. They want to sleep in, stay up later, eat differently, and generally be less responsible than they usually are. It can be tricky to do these things and still maintain good control of your diabetes. If you are looking for some practical pointers on how to make good choices and still enjoy yourself on vacation, read on.

Planning for a successful vacation with diabetes

The key to a happy, healthy vacation with diabetes is good planning. You know you have to plan other aspects of your vacation: you have to be sure there's a place to stay, that you have a way to get there, and that you have all your clothes and supplies with you, for example. Planning for a successful vacation with diabetes also means keeping in mind the following words to live by.

Spot the potholes. We all have our vacation weaknesses, situations when we are most likely to make bad choices. What's yours? Is it eating too much or exercising too little? Do your mealtimes and medication taking get whacky? Do you have too much stress or not enough sleep? Whatever your personal vacation pothole, recognize it and keep it in mind, so you will be prepared to manage it well.

Find the easiest way out. It is vacation, so you are looking to relax. You want the easiest way out of – or around – your vacation potholes, so the first question to ask yourself is this: "How much of a problem is this?" If your honest answer is, "not much", just forget about it. You don't need to do anything about the situation, and you don't need to feel bad about it either; everything is good.

What if it is a problem you want to do something about? Let's say you want to sleep in and not take your regular early morning walks. Doing this has some benefits: you get extra rest and you get to hang out with everyone in the morning when they wake up. But there's a downside as well: you will feel a little off and your blood sugars and weight may go up a bit. What is the easiest good choice available to you? How about changing your pattern and walking in the afternoon; you might get a family member to join you? Walking every other morning is another option, or you could cut down a bit on what you eat to keep your blood sugars and weight where you want them. Remember, you are looking for the *easiest* way to avoid getting stuck in your personal vacation pothole.

Check in regularly. Checking your blood sugars more often is especially helpful when you are on vacation and out of your regular routine. Most people are tempted to check less often on vacation, but more frequent checking can help you avoid problems, like worrying about your blood sugar levels when you don't know what they are. A quick check will tell you all is well or give you the information to set things straight. You will have more energy and more fun when your blood sugar levels are closer to normal.

Have real fun. What makes vacations special for you? What experiences do you really enjoy at the time and treasure in memory? Is it the relaxed times with your family that are so rare in your pressured everyday lives? Is it the thrill of riding down the water slide at an amusement park, or the beauty of sunset over the ocean? Whatever real fun means to you, be sure you get as much of it as you can while you are on vacation. Focus on what brings you real pleasure and forget the other stuff.

Keep the big picture in mind. Vacations are short. Most times that's a bad thing, but for those who struggle to make good choices on vacation, that can also be a good thing. No matter how far off track you get over vacation, you can get back on track quickly when your vacation ends – as long as you don't carry over a big dose of vacation guilt and discouragement.

Enjoy your vacation without guilt. Make the best choices you can while you are having fun. Then get back to your routine with the all the new energy and perspective having real fun can bring.