

International and Domestic Travel



Traveling is an adventure enjoyed globally. Indeed, you might be planning a trip within New Zealand or overseas right now. Living with epilepsy, or caring for someone who does, shouldn't stop you from travelling, it just might require a little more planning to ensure your individual needs are met.

When travelling, whether it is in New Zealand or overseas, there are a number of matters to consider which can help to ensure that your time away is enjoyable and safe. This includes matters such as preparation, documentation, medication, airlines and airports, accommodation, eating and drinking, insurance matters, and reciprocal health care arrangements that New Zealand has with other countries.

PREPARING FOR TRAVEL

- You may require vaccinations depending on where you plan to travel. If that's the case speak to your doctor about any impacts that having a vaccination may have on seizure activity and/or your anti-epileptic drugs ASMs.
- Seek advice from your doctor about adjusting your medication regime to accommodate changes in time zones. Remember, sleep deprivation (which can happen when travelling to different time zones and/ or long travel duration) can be a powerful trigger and you may be more vulnerable to seizure activity in these circumstances.
- It may be a good idea to travel with a companion who understands your epilepsy and knows what to do in the event of a seizure, unless you are confident that you won't need any assistance while away.
- If travelling with a tour group, make sure that the company and tour leader knows what to do in the event of a seizure. Be sure that the tour company has a copy of your [Seizure Management Plan \(SMP\)](#) (and [Emergency Medication Management Plan](#) if necessary) as this will assist them to provide you with the most appropriate and safe assistance should you have a seizure.
- Consider wearing a medical ID bracelet or other form of medical identification detailing that



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you have epilepsy and the type of seizure/s you have. Medical bracelets are generally recognised in most countries and will be of assistance should you be taken to hospital or a medical facility.

- Consider the best time of the year to travel, particularly if hot or cold weather is a seizure trigger for you.
- If tiredness and fatigue is a seizure trigger for you, have a rest before and during the trip. You might even want to consider a stop-over if the flight to your final destination is a lengthy one.
- Consider using a travel agent to make your bookings as they can assist you with checking specific information, which may or may not be related to your epilepsy.

DOCUMENTS

- Take a medical certificate or letter from your doctor that describes your epilepsy and seizure types, the name of your medications, how much medication is to be taken, and that it is for personal use only.
- Have your doctor's contact details with you, in case you need to get in touch for advice or assistance while travelling.

MEDICATIONS

- Factor in any time differences to ensure your medication is taken correctly and at the prescribed intervals.
- Have enough medication to cover the entire time away as, depending on where you are travelling to, it may be difficult to have prescriptions filled.
- It is best to keep the medication in its original packaging because this shows the name of the medication, that it has been prescribed for you, and the current dosage.
- Pack medications in a clear plastic bag, stored in carry-on luggage. This will reduce the risk of the medications being lost in transit.

AIRLINES AND AIRPORTS

- All airline companies are required to support the accessibility needs of travellers but it is important to make the airline aware of any specific needs when booking. It is particularly important to let the airline know if you have any mobility or support needs so that arrangements can be made to get you on and off the plane safely.
- Information about airline policies and specific accessibility support can usually be found on the company's website or by calling them directly.

- Some airports are very large and can have long distances between where you check-in and where you board the plane. If mobility is a concern or you have already been travelling for an extended period and worried about seizure activity, you may want to consider requesting assistance (motorised vehicle or travel chair) to get to or from gate lounges. This can be particularly useful if you are rushing to catch a connecting flight, and you are concerned that the stress of this may lead to seizure activity.

ACCOMMODATION

- If mobility is a consideration for you, check that your destination hotel is accessible. For example, check whether it has accessible entry, ramps and/or safe shower access.
- If you require the use of a shower chair, speak to the hotel to make sure that they can accommodate your needs.
- On arrival at your accommodation check for any sharp objects or furniture which could be harmful should you experience a seizure. Don't risk hurting yourself or causing damage when moving furniture by always asking for assistance from hotel staff.

EATING AND DRINKING

- When travelling you may find that your usual eating patterns and food choices change, particularly when in other countries. Eat food that you are confident won't interfere with seizure activity – just ask restaurant staff about food ingredients if you're unsure.
- Eat regularly to keep up your blood sugar levels, as for some people low blood sugar levels can be a seizure trigger.
- Holidays can be a great time of celebration and relaxation, and there may be a temptation to drink alcohol at levels which could increase seizure activity. Remember, consuming too much alcohol can be risky for people living with epilepsy.
- If you are in a country or region where the water quality is uncertain drink only bottled water. Only use safe water when brushing your teeth too. Drinking or using water of uncertain quality can lead to feeling unwell or gastric upsets, which can reduce the absorption of ASMs and possibly lead to seizure activity.

INSURANCE

- When travelling overseas it is highly recommended that all people have relevant travel insurance to protect belongings and health.
- Most travel insurance companies regard epilepsy as a pre-existing condition. This may translate to paying a higher insurance premium or you may find it difficult to obtain insurance that will cover health.



- Many travel insurance companies will require that there has been no changes to your medication regime and/or no hospital admissions in the past 12 – 24 months before they will insure you. So, be sure to discuss your specific circumstances with potential insurers to learn about their insurance coverage terms and conditions.
- Be honest and accurate when speaking with a potential travel insurer. Non-disclosure of known issues such as epilepsy may invalidate your insurance policy. Being without travel insurance for health can have significant financial implications and it is important to check your coverage.
- More information about travelling with chronic health conditions and disabilities and how this may impact on travel insurance [can be found on the Compare Travel Insurance website](#).

RECIPROCAL HEALTH CARE ARRANGEMENTS

- New Zealand has reciprocal health care arrangements that cover the cost of medically necessary care for New Zealanders visiting Australia and the United Kingdom. This means that you can receive emergency care or medical support whilst away.
- Participating countries, eligibility requirements and the agreement conditions New Zealand has with each nation are detailed on the [Ministry of Health Website](#) website.

GOVERNMENT ADVICE

When planning international travel, it is a good idea to check New Zealand Government websites that provide a range of safe travel tips, updates and tools. These include:

- [Safe Travel](#) – provides a range of advice and tips to help you prepare for your journey, clear security checks quickly and easily, and information for travellers with specific needs.
- [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) – provides updated information about the safety of countries you are planning to visit, consular details, and a place where you can save your trip itinerary and contact details in the event of an emergency in the country you are visiting.